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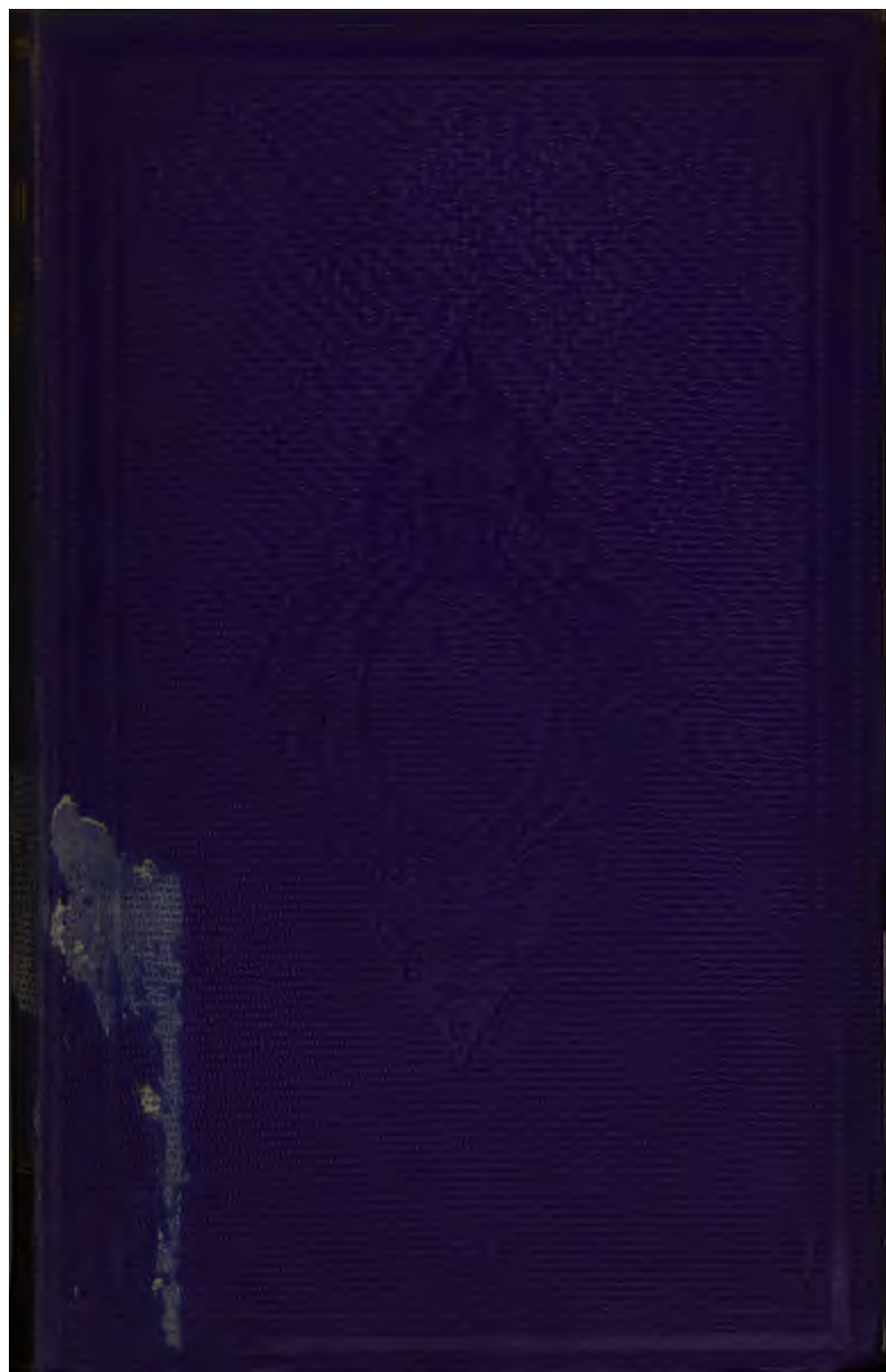
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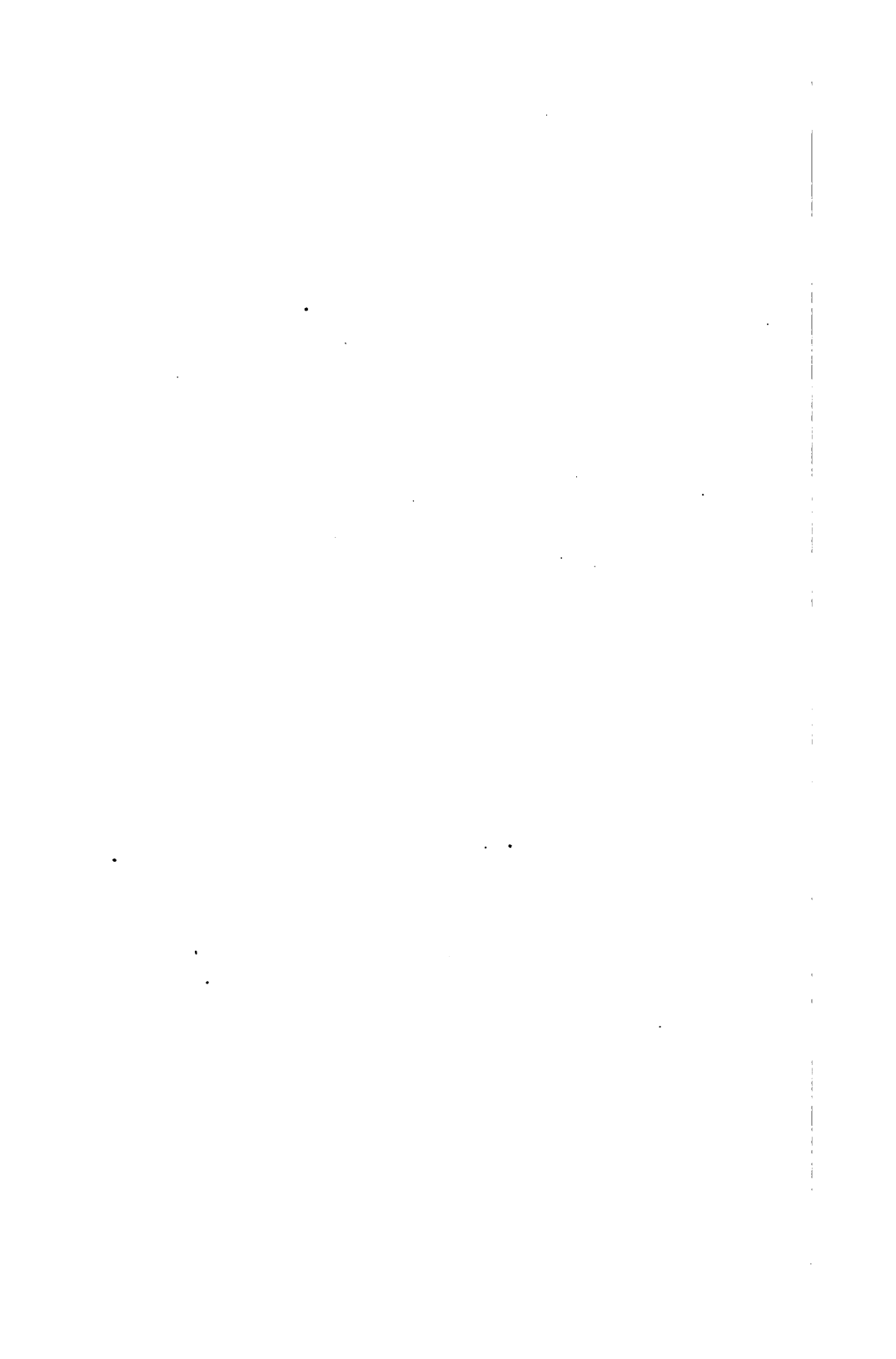
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A GREAT SENSATION.

BY

EDWARD HENEAGE DERING,

AUTHOR OF "LETHELIER."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A GREAT SENSATION.

CHAPTER I.

A FINE organisation and the volcanic air of Naples had really, or apparently, recovered Lord Elfintower to a degree that no one would have ventured to predict or imagine when he left home.

Therefore Rupert, having business to settle for him, started for England in November, and landed at Folkestone two days after Mrs. Grahame and Constance arrived in London.

Remaining in London a few hours, which he passed chiefly at Lincoln's Inn, he went into —shire, to the property his brother

had inherited with the title—where remaining a week he started for Ernsford Court, which he reached about eight o'clock in the evening of the following Monday, the 20th of November.

Rest after toil, silence after noise, hope after anxiety, are three sequences that bear strong analogy to each other; and of each it may be said that the antecedent throws its shadow over the sequent.

This thoroughly applies to Rupert's arrival at Ernsford Court at the hour above named. He was resting after a week of continuous and harassing small business—sitting amid the unbroken silence of a breezeless November night at Ernsford, after the din of railroads, and the buzz of discordant voices protracting the misapplication of tedious propositions: He was hoping, after anxiety so deep, that its removal was even then felt as a fresh event. But the toil, the noise, and the anxiety had their echo—and if the echo was faint, the stillness was intense.

The mind-echo died away, and the stillness became more intense—so intense, that it seemed rather a suspension than a disjunction—a holding of the breath on the edge of a syllable—a clearance of ground for fresh images to pass in review.

Which they did. Image after image—in words and ideal shapes—rose up out of the seeming nothingness, and went by in disordered succession, rapidly and vividly, as they are wont to do in an active brain whose owner is sitting alone in a quiet and familiar spot after disturbing occupations elsewhere.

They passed in review before him—scenes expressive and impressive of pleasure and pain in all their indefinable shades, features expressive and impressive of emotions good, bad, indifferent and quiescent—words and sentences spoken and inferred, expressive and impressive of regret, unsatisfiedness or acquiescence—questions expres-

sive and impressive of every gradation between doubt and supposed certainty.

And as the scenes passed in review, the pain threw its shadow over the pleasure; the expression of the features repeatedly varied from that which it had appeared in its actuality; acquiescence retrograded to unsatisfiedness and regret; supposed certainty fell back to positive doubt.

He thought of Constance — of the impression she had created in his mind when, at their first meeting in London, after a lapse of four years, she had appeared to him as though seen for the first time; he thought of their subsequent interview, so strange, so varied in its character; he thought of the day when he had turned from Grosvenor Square with a feeling of bitter triumph, and cantered into the park — the day when he was first attracted by the strange lady whom he afterwards sought so ridiculously in Cadogan Place — the day when, without any legitimate excuse, he

broke the laws of hospitality and courtesy, by doing his best to spoil the harmony of a small dinner party to which he had been asked in friendship—the day when, assuming himself to be aggrieved on the unacknowledged supposition of a requited affection for Constance, which he had virtually denied when he rode away from Grosvenor Square, and virtually affirmed by his behaviour at Greenwich, he first refused to accept the opportunity of ascertaining whether the assumed grievance were real or fancied, and then acted on the further assumption that it had emanated from her.

He thought of these things, and he was unsatisfied with himself.

The specious arguments by which he had hastily silenced his own objections now lost their seeming solidity, and dissolved like an air-bubble: he remembered with pain those thoughts, words and actions, which in moments of morbid feeling

had given him fictitious pleasure: he remembered and dwelt on with regret the short period of happiness that he had felt without sounding its depth.

A different image, with different ideas encircling it, took its place in his mind — it represented the form, features and supposed individualism of the strange lady, the model of Molini's Francesca da Rimini.

As in reality, so in pictured fancy, this image differed startlingly from the others: beautiful, fascinating, interesting — she left, now as when he first saw her, an impression painful, unsatisfactory, incomplete. He tried to recall in detail, for the sake of comparison, the impression created by Constance; but between her and him there seemed to be a veil so long as this image held its place.

He turned himself wholly to the recollection of his long interview with Constance; but another image interposed — it represented the form, features, and his-

tory of Edith. He rose from his chair, and, as it were, pushed from his mind all the images that were ranged before it—all, at least, except the one which, among them all, had held its own peculiar and remarkable place.

"I will take care," said he aloud, "that the murderous scene acted in this room shall not be repeated. . . . He is safe now; for he has survived that last ordeal, and there is nothing worse in the long catalogue of possible human trials."

He turned to leave the room, but started back in astonishment at seeing his brother himself standing before him, at five or six paces distance. His surprise was great, but not greater than would be natural in one who sees a person not positively expected: neither the strangeness of the circumstance nor the imprudence of such a step appeared to him in their extremeness: his impulse was to rejoice, yet he did not instantly move.

Lord Elfintower was standing just under the east window : he looked perfectly well and happy—even more so than he had done for three years. He remained standing for a few seconds, during which Rupert did not move — then without speaking, left the gallery by the nearest door, which was half open.

Rupert began to feel uncomfortably perplexed : he followed his brother, and called him by name : no answer was returned.

The hall outside was not lighted, and three other doors led from it : Rupert ran back, and seizing a candle searched through every issue from the hall, but with no better success.

Without giving himself time to analyse his anxiety, he violently rang the bells in several rooms, went up the nearest staircase, passed rapidly through passages and bedrooms, ran down another staircase, and returning into the hall, found the old housekeeper and butler with the rest of the

actual establishment assembled there in a state of mingled terror and astonishment.

The candle had guttered into shapelessness, covering his hand and sleeve with wax. He threw the candlestick on the floor, and said :

"What has become of him? How did he come? Does no one know where he is? It's enough to drive one mad! Speak — somebody!"

"I haven't seen nobody, sir," said the under-housemaid, twiddling her apron-string.

"I don't know who it is you mean, sir—I'm sure I don't," said the old housekeeper, setting her cap preparatory to scolding him in private for this indecorous proceeding, unprecedented during the sixty years she had lived in the family.

"I don't know, sir—I'm sure . . . I can't tell at all," said she, edging up towards him. "I can't tell what it is you mean, Master Rupert."

"I mean my brother," said Rupert ;
"who else *can* I mean ?"

The housekeeper began to think that he was raving for the love of Constance ; and remembered now having always said that "no good would come of Mr. Grahame's setting himself up there at Moorfield."

She looked at him with the peculiar fondness of an old servant, and said :

"Why, Master Rupert, whatever is the matter with you ?"

"Nothing the matter with me," he answered, half doubting the truth of his own words. "Nothing the matter. . . . But why has nobody seen him? How is it that nobody saw him come in — that nobody opened the door — at this time of night? Somebody *must* have seen him."

All protested that they had not done so, and exhibited unfeigned astonishment at the question.

A dreadful suspicion came into his mind and blanched his cheek.

"Get the dog-cart ready at once," he said: "never mind anything else, but be quick — and mind the lamps, for I want to catch the half-past eleven o'clock train. Forward the letters to me at Naples."

Hastily throwing on a great-coat, and catching up a leather box containing money and papers, he ran out into the courtyard. He had need to have spoken about the lamps, for the night was pitch dark, and it rained in torrents.

"The luggage, sir?" asked the groom, who got in to go with him.

"Never mind the luggage. Let him go," he answered, as the horse, who was very fresh, stood up on end.

The horse started with a jerk that tried the strength of the harness severely, passed under the archway of the gatehouse at a pace that made the sound of the wheels almost deafening, and finally settled down into a swinging gallop, which, with the exception of pulling up at the lodge, lasted

to the station. When he arrived there he found that the train was not due for twenty minutes; but the certainty of being in time seemed scarcely to diminish his anxiety. Not till he was seated in the carriage, and the train fairly off, was he able to think over what had passed.

Then fresh details, visible before, but unobserved, came out distinctly, one by one, like stars on a gusty moonlight night. He saw over again the scene that had passed in the gallery, and remembered things which, in the excitement of the two main facts, his recollection had retained without noticing. The circumstances of the case appeared by degrees more and more clearly, and each detail, as it came out, confirmed more and more the reality of what he had seen; whilst two main facts, horribly irreconcilable, stood before him stubbornly — neither of them yielding in the smallest degree to any contrary sup-

position. His brother had not been in the gallery at Ernsford Court—yet he had seen him there.

Passing strange are the indefinite conclusions of a mind in turmoil—untraceable the course by which it reaches them: through terror it often arrives at hope—through hopefulness at anxiety.

Through some such devious course Rupert's thoughts inscrutably meandered. He saw with the mind's eye his brother, as he had appeared in the gallery—he saw him as then: but now he noticed what before he had only seen—and thus his brother appeared:

Like, yet more than, his former self—transcendent in beauty—transcendent in the expression of happiness—transcendent in the expression of love—transcendent in the expression of intensity—transcendent, perhaps, beyond the limits of earthly transcendence: thus he saw him.

And thus he reasoned upon it — or rather followed the eddies of probability.

He told himself that in the apparition abstractedly there was nothing remarkable or otherwise than to be expected — that it was the single or combined result of an hour's solitary musing, of the subjects of such musing, the connection of the locality with the subjects, an insensible indigestion from dining late after a long journey and equally long fast, an hallucination produced by the united action of memory, fancy and unrecognised sleepiness — anything, in fact, or everything that might be supposed to cause the thing vaguely called an optical delusion.

Telling himself these things, yet withal inexplicably anxious, he arrived at Naples as soon as the available means of travelling would allow.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when he landed amid the usual cries of "Nè! monsù! carrozz'!" He hailed the

nearest carriage, and, as quickly as an active little Neapolitan horse would take him, reached his journey's end, which was about half way along the Chiaja.

"Nè! monsignù," said the coachman, in a suggestive tone, seeing that Rupert was entering the courtyard, without showing any intention of paying him.

Rupert turned back, threw him a ducat, which was ten times his fare, ran to the foot of the staircase with increasing anxiety, and ascended it slowly.

He rang the bell gently, and hesitated to ring again, though there was some delay in answering it. In a minute or two a woman called out from the inside:

"Chi c'è?"

"Son io. Aprite!" answered Rupert, in a quick, nervous accent.

Instead of opening the door she retreated rapidly, calling out:

"Nè! Antonio!"

In another minute the man thus called,

who was a travelling servant, opened the door.

"My lord!" he exclaimed, half aloud, . . . so quick . . . così presto . . . pare incredibile."

"Don't call me *that yet*," said Rupert, speaking huskily — but neither excited nor surprised.

He walked into the room where his brother had usually sat: everything in it indicated — not inhabitation but preparation. He walked into the room where his brother had slept. The bed was made, and the room empty of everything but the furniture belonging to it. Here, as in the sitting-room, everything told of past and future — nothing of the present.

He turned away and was silent for some minutes. At length he said in a subdued voice:

"Antonio."

The servant, who had been accustomed to see him more or less impetuous and demon-

strative, was so taken aback by this strange calmness that he could scarcely answer. Rupert looked at him with an expression difficult to define; it was neither fixed nor vacant—neither searching nor indifferent; it was concentrated and something more. He looked at him thus for a few seconds, and said:

“When?”

“Last Monday night—about ten o’clock:” answered the servant, seemingly more moved than Rupert was.

“How long ill?” asked Rupert.

“Less than half an hour,” he replied.

“And when?” added Rupert, in the same tone and manner.

“Yesterday,” answered the servant, with an involuntary shiver.

“Was anyone here?”

“Sir John Champion.”

“Is he here now?”

“He left immediately after, to tell you. He thought you were at Ernsford Court.”

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve.

The north wind howled desolately through the courtyard at Ernsford: the snow flakes fell thin and sharp through the cold blast: the grass in the park looked blackish-green wherever the snow did not lie.

In the transept of the village church the pavement was displaced above a flight of steps that led to the family vault of the Ernshams. The church itself was empty, and had been so for some time; but in the vault a light was burning. Rupert had been there since it was opened early that day: he was there still.

And in the vault was a coffin that had arrived on that morning with Rupert from Naples: on it was inscribed:



Edgar, eleventh Earl of Elfhintower,
Died Nov. 20, 18—. Aged 29.
R. I. P.

It was four o'clock when Rupert ascended the steps of the vault. He lingered a moment in the chancel, then turned suddenly, left the church, and walked rapidly home.

The north wind howled desolately through the gatehouse, and moaned in the angles of the courtyard: the threadlike flakes of snow seemed to hang on the blast rather than fall: a carriage was being packed at the door.

The old housekeeper stood in the hall, absorbed in silent grief. Rupert took her hand affectionately, and said:

"Good-bye, God bless you! I hope to be back before long. I would stay now if I *could*."

"God bless him!" she said, as the carriage drove off. "I shall never see him again in this world, I suppose; I am old, and this loss has shaken me more than all the trials that I have had . . . Please God, may he turn out like his brother!"

CHAPTER II.

A CHAPTER RETROSPECTIVE AND PROGRESSIVE.

A YEAR and five months after the event last detailed, Rupert returned to Ernsford Court. The old housekeeper was alive. She looked at him wistfully, and said :

“ You are grown very like him — and yet not. You don’t look at rest — as he did, even at the worst of his troublous life.”

She had described the truth accurately.

Rupert’s likeness to his brother had grown startlingly apparent during sixteen months of real sorrow ; and the separable unlikeness showed more distinctly through the widened contrast, though perhaps not actually greater than before. The likeness and unlikeness were as follows :

He was like him in the shape of his fea-

tures — and that shape had been toned into resemblance more perfect: he was like him in the colour of his complexion — and that colour had grown more like by mellowing: he was like him in figure — and he had grown to seem more like by a greater resemblance in his general bearing. He was unlike him by reason of a general and presiding expression which, permeating the whole, was yet separable from it, and being separated for description, is thus describable by comparison with that of his brother:

His brother's presiding expression had been one of transpectant hope (if such a word may be permitted) — hope seeing beyond the limits of experience: his own was one of morbid, inert resistance — he seemed to protest against the inevitable, and turn away from the oracles of his own heart.

Cause and effect often lie very distant from each other, and the cause often has several inconsistent sequents; so that the final effect is not very easy to determine.

Rupert had mourned his brother with a depth and persistency as peculiar as the tone of their intercourse, and the effects of his loss had been —

The absorption of all his faculties in one terrible sorrow, too intense to utter or contemplate; the suspension of all interest; open resentment against the visible and immediate producers of the evil; half unconscious resentment against the world in general, as though it were collectively to blame for it; abstract resentment in the garb of mourning — that lying principle under whose cover religious feeling is superseded, diminished or destroyed.

These combined effects had formed the presiding expression which the old house-keeper had well characterised when she said to him, "You don't look at rest." The actual question is: Will he ever look at rest? Turn we now to Edith.

Turn we to Edith, on whom the effects of the same cause had been successively —

Suspension of all self-originating impulses ; immersion in grief that was deeper than the actual depth of her nature—deep as the potential ; a heart-sickening sense of isolation within immeasurable vastness ; a morbid contemplation of self-pity, till the contemplation grew into a self-indulgence, and the self-indulgence grew into a luxury of grieving, and the luxury of grieving sapped the power of moral discrimination, and volition halted between self-abandonment and self-preservation, and the misguided instinct of happiness pleaded for distraction in the name of duty, and unenjoying distraction was pursued with the combined impulses of self-abasement and self-gratification.

These were the successive effects, and they too formed a presiding expression of unrest—yet not exactly Rupert's unrest. His was the unrest of conscious incompleteness—hers the unrest of unconscious dete-

roration; but the line between the two is faint abstractedly.

Turn we to Constance, in whom the consistent and persistent effect of the same cause had been—

Mourning for personal loss; sorrow for the consequences of the event; continual perception of a blank space in the beautiful; increased apprehensiveness, increased expectancy, increased self-exactingness; a presiding expression of faith, hope, and charity, shadowed by the fresh traces of self-conflicts.

The above description may be supposed as made for the end of May or beginning of June—Rupert being at Ernsford Court, and intending to remain there as long as Moorfield should be empty.

It was between and one two o'clock on the Derby day—the period when London seems to be the most deserted city in Europe. The public carriages were as empty as the streets: a stray four-wheeled cab might be

seen returning from one of the hospitals, or a stray omnibus with one inside—probably a drawing-master on his way to some establishment for young ladies at Notting Hill—

With which locality we have at present to do. In one of the many mock-gothic and mock-castellated villas which there abound amid brick walls and laburnum, lived the mysterious lady who had respectively attracted Molini to paint her portrait from memory, and Edith to watch her during the greater portion of two evenings at the opera: the lady whom Rupert had first seen in Kensington Gardens, on the day when he successively returned from Ernsford Court—turned away in anger from Mrs. Grahame's door—galloped up and down Rotten Row for a *sfogo*—pulled up facing the breeze, to congratulate himself thereupon—met Sir John Campion, and indulged himself with uncharitable reflections concerning him—dined with him afterwards at Greenwich, and made himself extremely dis-

agreeable there—went to Edith's concert when the music was just over—stood within half-a-dozen yards of Constance for ten minutes, walked away without speaking to her, and went home feeling himself aggrieved: the lady whom Constance had seen in Kensington Gardens, on the day when she pulled the child out of the water, and Mrs. Grahame bought a carved oak wardrobe in Wardour Street for the sum of forty-eight pounds, rubbed up and sent: the lady referred to by Constance in Edith's bedroom, on the morning after the Tedminster ball, when she was interrupted by a voice from the rustling silk: the lady seen by Edith in Bond Street, on her wedding morning: the lady handed into a carriage by Sir John Campion, at the corner of a green lane: the lady received by Lady Goodwin with material hospitality and a serious twinkle: the lady known to the reader as Caterina Guarini.

Our present object is to trace her career

since the period when we left her studying deportment under the Misses Twinbriggles. She remained with Lady Goodwin four months, viz. till the middle of February, when their ill-assorted connection was suddenly broken off in the following very probable manner, from the following very probable causes :

Lady Goodwin's influence over her had never penetrated below the surface : it had never touched a vital part — never awakened a genuine response : it had touched, but not moved her heart — stirred but not convinced her mind — excited but not informed her conscience. Therefore when the sight of Lord Ravensdale in Bond Street roused and animated respectively the two contiguous extremes — anger and love, a reactionary state of feeling, rapid and strong in proportion to her morbid unsatisfiedness, began instantaneously : therefore, when Lady Goodwin applied her admonitions in a tone rather more harsh, uncharitable, and un-

convincing than usual, neither mind nor heart could quell the rebellion of a southern temperament — for the opinions of the one floated on the surface of variable sensation, like a spar drifting before a current, and the affections of the other were only warmed to be instantly chilled again — whilst the cold, dry nature of Lady Goodwin was made yet colder and drier by contact with the fiery one, as wine bottles are iced by being encased in wet flannel and exposed in a draught to the sun: therefore, when standing before each other blindfold — each misjudging the other with consistent inconsistency, they touched upon several points unusually provocative of their antagonisms, the breach widened, and there was no healing power to restore it.

They parted; and they did so irreconcilably — with rankling words, that increased the intolerance of each for the other, and made each more uncharitable than before. But of course the effect was unequal: Lady Goodwin was satisfied with

her own pessimistic optimism, and resigned herself without a shudder to the conviction that the person in whom she had been mainly interested during the last four months had been created expressly to be damned: Caterina encountered the antagonistic world, remorseless for herself—remorseless against herself.

The rest will appear in the following conversation, which took place in a villa at Notting Hill, where she lived at the time with which we have now to do.

The room where she sat was one of two small ones, separated by a low arch: they were well proportioned: their furniture and appointments well chosen and well disposed. At the end of the farther one was Caterina, looking rather handsomer than ever, but rather less lovely. The whole effect was admirable to the eye exclusively—unstable and unreal to the mind—cold and unsatisfactory to the heart.

Sir John Campion entered the room un-

announced, and came towards her: she got up from her seat to greet him. The full view of her countenance, to be seen as she raised her eyes, told a pitiful tale of deterioration: it was less feminine, less loving, less passionate, less impulsive, less suffering, less unsatisfied, less mistaken: it expressed more mistrustfulness, more resentment, more intention, more reservation, more unsettlement of principles, more attention to material prosperity.

But it expressed something more at that moment: it expressed incidental uneasiness. Sir John sat down by her, scrutinised her carefully for a few seconds, without seeming to do so, and said:

“Will you kindly give me your attention for a few minutes?”

Caterina was puzzled by the expression of his countenance: it was more penetrating than ever, but not at all cynical: it was earnest yet subdued. She looked at him unsteadily, and said nothing.

"I must ask your attention for five minutes," he said, rather more decisively, after a short pause.

"Certainly," she answered, with more alacrity than the occasion seemed to warrant. "Of course — why not? But I can't imagine what it can be about."

"I believe this is generally the case, more or less, beforehand," remarked Sir John, relapsing for a moment into his old cynicism, balanced between jest and earnest.

Caterina changed colour, and her eyes flashed angrily under their depressed lids. Sir John looked at her, and paused as though debating, not to say struggling, with himself; then his manner realtered to what it had been when he entered the room, and he said:

"You know neither the best nor the worst of me yet: you give me too much and too little credit. You don't know yourself either: you don't know how much less amiable you are than you were: you are in the way to

injure yourself: you are damping the best impulse that I ever yet had—or, at least retained long enough to be of any use. I want to explain what has happened, and what *may* happen. You think I am never more than half serious; and perhaps it has been my fault that you think so—but I *am* serious now.”

Caterina looked at him with an unpleasant expression of incredulity, and said:

“You have told me the same thing before, but I never found that you were more serious for saying so. Have you been sitting under one of Lady Goodwin’s preachers?”

“Begging your pardon for contradicting you,” answered Sir John, “I never said the same thing before. If you desire, to reproach me, do so — though the present is not quite the best chosen moment for it; but don’t sneer at me on the plea that I have done what I have not done, and ought to have done.”

"I cannot tell what you mean," she said, looking puzzled. "I suppose I misunderstood what you meant. . . . And I don't know now what you mean. I did not mean to offend you : but," she added, with a smile that was not agreeable, "you are so much more serious than usual, that I really thought you had been converted, as Lady Goodwin used to call it."

Sir John made no reply for a minute or two : and his mind again seemed to balance doubtfully, till Caterina rose from her seat, and was about to leave the room, when he seemed to recollect himself, and said :

"I thought that you were going to do me the honour of listening to me for a few minutes?"

"I thought you had said what you wished to say," she answered, changing colour, and looking away from everything.

"How can that be when I said that I wished to explain, and have not yet ex-

plained anything?" said Sir John, trying to meet her eye, which she persistently prevented.

"Then why do you talk to me at all, if you do not believe what I say?" said she, bending down her head and turning over some music.

"Caterina! this is idle bandying of words," replied Sir John, in a tone whose unmistakeable seriousness riveted her attention. "You are wasting your time in a futile attempt to deceive me and yourself. Now do be kind enough to listen with your mind and heart, as well as your ears; because what I am going to say concerns you most importantly."

Caterina threw down the music, seated herself on a sofa shaded by a window-curtain, and fixed her eyes on an embroidered apron that she wore. One of Sir John's old expressions hovered for an instant on his countenance, and vanished. He sat down opposite her, and said:

"I told you just now that you knew neither the worst nor the best of me. I will explain to you the worst and the best, as far as I am able to do so. The worst of me, as regards yourself, is this:

"Three years ago I exercised bad influence on Lord Ravensdale, without seeming to do it, or knowing that I did it. By what I said and left to be inferred, I induced him (as I have since supposed) to go to Carlsbad, which perhaps he might not otherwise have done. I did this on your account; I was fascinated by you. The motive was a mixed one — not so bad as it appears: for in fact, incredible as it may seem to you, I really deceived myself. But I am not going to explain away or keep back.

"I saw you a great deal; you were more attractive then than now, though you are perhaps handsomer now than then; I was fascinated, and I cared for you more than you believed then, or probably ever will believe. I saw that you were totally un-

appreciated, and would soon be totally neglected. Put all this together, and you will see why I did what you know I did — I mean why I was the cause of his going to Carlsbad.”

Caterina looked up in blank affirmation of what he had last said, and refixed her eyes on her apron. Sir John’s self-esteem became visibly discomposed — no man, let the back of his head’s top be ever so lofty, can undergo that particular look from a woman without becoming small in his own eyes for a time — but he recovered himself quickly, and said :

“Is it not better to hear me out fairly? I am quite ready to acknowledge that you can make me feel uncomfortable by looking blank and twirling the tassel of your apron-string.”

The hot blood mantled quickly in Caterina’s cheeks; she rose, and stood in an angle of the window. Sir John went on to say :

"I have told you the worst of myself; now you shall hear the best—that is, if you will listen, which at present you are not doing."

"What would you have me do or say? I am listening; I am not interrupting you," said Caterina, changing her position to the other angle of the window.

"Only to give me your attention, which you were not doing," answered Sir John. "Well, the best of me, as regards what has occurred, is this: I was very sorry when I heard of Lord Ravensdale's engagement to Miss Grahame; for I liked and respected Lord Elfintower. I felt ashamed of myself for having indirectly persuaded Ravensdale to go to Carlsbad. I felt answerable for what occurred there, as in fact I was, if what I said to him really had the effect of making him go there—for at no other time could he have succeeded. I was struck with a feeling of remorse, too, as regarded yourself, though, from knowing him well, I knew that

the same thing was sure to happen to you eventually. Honestly, and without any *arrière pensée*, I came myself to tell you the news, had a carriage waiting for you at the corner of the lane, introduced you to my sister, and never came near you as long as you were with her. These two different ways of acting were, and are, contradictory; I don't attempt to deny that they are; but the contradiction is natural enough. I had not seen Elfintower, since he was a boy, till a few months before the time we are speaking of; and I had been struck by his very high tone of feelings—more struck than I thought at the time. On the impression which he then made, I acted, when I took charge of you from the corner of the lane to my sister's house. On the impression which he has since made," continued Sir John, while his voice quivered, "I now act, when I offer to . . . when I ask you to be my wife."

Caterina was completely taken by sur-

prise, and seemed overcome by strong emotion. Sir John looked at her with an anxious expression of countenance, and said:

"I am obliged to leave town to-day; for after being a year out of England, I have many things to attend to. I shall be back in three weeks or a month. . . . Do you accept me?"

He half held out his hand. She took it, and turned deadly pale.

Half a minute afterwards, Sir John left the room and the house.

"I have satisfied my conscience, and ruined myself," he thought, or rather said half aloud, as he rode away from the door.

The old smile—half cynicism, half humour, stole across his countenance momentarily, as he added:

"Perhaps my conscience, being over fresh for want of work, is running away with me. The world will say that I have acted "not wisely, but too well."

The smile very quickly disappeared, and was replaced by a look of excessive depression. He rode on, debating with himself on what he had just done. He reviewed his own past life, and sighed bitterly over the waste of opportunities, or rather of the power that might have made them. He doubted intermittently whether he were not volunteering to be a dupe in some way or other. But the idea which persisted among all the rest, like a pedal note, was:

“ I *suppose* I have done right.”

He had scarcely turned into the Bayswater Road, when the bell rang at the gate of the house he had just quitted. Caterina seemed startled, but not surprised. Her cheek flushed at quick, returning intervals, and intermediately paled. In about a minute the gate was heard to open, and soon afterwards the servant announced “ a gentleman on business ; the same that came once before.”

She drew herself up haughtily ; but her

countenance only half corresponded to the haughtiness of her manner; it rather indicated resentment, bitterness, effort, passion, relapse. She made a haughty gesture, however, and said, in a voice that was a little too firm to be natural,

"Why do you come here again, Lord Ravensdale, after what I told you the last time? Cannot you leave me where you found me to be?"

"I have been very unfortunate," he replied, in a tone half grumbling, half servile.

For the next few seconds they stood opposite each other in silence expressive and characteristic—a curious picture to theorise upon. Lord Ravensdale was so evidently the inferior creature of the two, that his former influence was a marvel, and would be inexplicable, if one had never read of Titania and Bottom.

"I was dragged into it, you know," said he.

"Dragged from Ravensdale to Carlsbad, when you were just starting for Scotland,"

answered Caterina, with as much dryness as one of her country and temperament could muster with much effort.

He coloured, and made an ineffectual attempt to force his way through the difficulty by looking dogged and repeating his statement in an undoubting tone.

"I was dragged into it," he began.

"Dragged to every riding party at which you could meet her," added Caterina, in the same tone and manner as before.

"Dragged from Carlsbad to Dresden, when you were engaged to stay at Perringston—from Carlsbad to Dresden, from Dresden to Frankfort, from Frankfort to Brussels, from Brussels to Paris—dragged wherever she went, *till* you had married her. Yes! you were dragged into it; you were dragged into it by your own grovelling desire to possess her money—and *herself for a week*. You were dragged into it by——"

"By what?" he asked, with a look of blank insensibility.

There is a terrible power in nothingness ; we are apt to think it something by reason of its vague extent ; and the mind exhausts itself by trying to find a something which is not there. Not otherwise can one account for the fact that Lord Ravensdale's blank look, whose whole force consisted in non-existence, disconcerted her who should have rather disconcerted him. He became emboldened by impunity, and repeated in a somewhat defiant tone :

“By what ?”

He had better have “left well alone :” her eyes flashed under their depressed lids, and she answered with alarming rapidity :

“By every motive except what you pretend : by the heartlessness that would cast off a woman who had renounced earth and heaven for you : by the selfishness that would sacrifice the happiness of two happy people—causing the death of the one, and perilling the eventual reputation of the other, merely to save retrenching for two

or three years, to pay debts selfishly incurred: by the baseness that would deliberately marry her to neglect her and insult her in the tenderest point, almost before her eyes. I hate *her*, but I loathe *you*."

During this burst of indignation, it was observable that her eyes were constantly lowered and averted. Lord Ravensdale looked sulky for a moment or two, and then accidentally said the right thing, or rather blundered up against it.

"I know I behaved very badly to you," said he, "I know how ill I behaved; and I've never been happy since But I didn't think you had forgotten me all the while that I was so miserable because I couldn't find out where you were."

"It's very wicked and untrue of you to say that I forgot you," interrupted Caterina.

"Then why are you so hard upon me now, when I've been such a long time try-

ing to find you out, and I'm ready to do anything in the world for you, if you'll only let me?"

Caterina's eyes were constantly lowered and averted; her colour came and went; her voice trembled with emotion interpretable several ways. Lord Ravensdale repeated:

"I'm ready to do anything in the world for you, if you'll only let me."

This time, as before, he had said just too much. The emotion audible in her voice was now interpretable one way only, and she answered, with the same rapidity of utterance as before:

"Sir John Campion befriended me when I was abandoned by you, to whom I had sacrificed everything: to *him* I owe that I did not starve or sink into degradation even more horrible than you had brought me to: he has treated me with unvarying kindness ever since: if I cannot feel for him what I once felt for you, at

least I feel gratitude, respect and affection. Would you hear the truth—you who, after four years' desertion, seek again the indulgence of your rested fancy, and call it constancy? I am going to be married to him; and I tell you to leave the house. Go to your wife! Do you think that you can repair your injury to me by injuring her?"

Lord Ravensdale turned, as if to leave the room, then turned again and said:

"Perhaps I am nearer being free from that odious marriage than you think But I see Campion has supplanted me: I saw *what he was at*, before I went to Carlsbad."

There was absolute silence for nearly a minute: when Caterina raised her eyes he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

At this time Rupert was actually in London, though nominally at Ernsford Court: he had come the day before, for the purpose of seeing the monument to his brother, which was just finished and waiting to be forwarded. He had chosen that day for that visit as Lord Ravensdale had chosen it for his—because the Derby would extract from London a large percentage of its inhabitants and sojourners.

About one o'clock he went to see it. It was an altar-tomb of inlaid black and white marble. The figure was recumbent, with a cross on the breast: the hands were raised in attitude of prayer. The likeness was accurate—the sculptor having known him when alive.

As Rupert was leaving the room, Molini entered it.

"I thought you were still in Italy," he said. "I am come here for the same purpose as you are It is very well executed; and the design is worthy of your taste *and his*. I shall never see any one like him—unless it is yourself perhaps some day. You have grown very like him in appearance—but not quite."

"I never shall be," said Rupert gloomily. "His death has left me too many memories that raise and keep alive the devil in me."

Molini looked puzzled, and was silent for a minute or two—examining the altar-tomb critically meanwhile. At length he said:

"You are out of spirits, and you are averse to the distraction of society; but you will come to my house this evening, to meet half a dozen Italians, and hear some music without being crushed in a crowd?"

"Don't ask me to-day, my dear fellow," answered Rupert. "Another day——"

"You will see the mysterious model," urged Molini. "I have found out who she is: she is a countrywoman of mine. She has sat to me for two pictures—by the by, she sings, and sings well."

"Well, if I don't come then, I'll come and see you to-morrow morning," said Rupert, as he shut the door. "I shall be in town three weeks. Good-bye. I am going to have a canter in the park."

He had his canter in Rotten Row, which was as empty as if it had been the month of November; and, turning off by the bridge, near the entrance to Kensington Gardens, was startled by a well-known figure, which passed before him, coming out of the gate. It was not the mysterious model—it was Edith.

The first impulse of both was to push on: the second was to stop. Edith especially seemed rooted to the spot: Rupert seemed to exercise a Gorgon-like fascina-

tion upon her. At length she said, without well knowing what:—

“Will you come to see me—if you can forgive and bear the sight of me? Will you be generous? I am very miserable.”

“I will . . . if I am not prevented,” answered Rupert, in a strange tone, and with a strange expression of countenance. “I will come. . . . I am hurried now.”

He turned and cantered back into Rotten Row. Edith threw her veil over her face, and walked back into Kensington Gardens.

Before the Derbyites unpolitical had returned from Epsom, Rupert was indoors, self-debating whether he should go to Molini's that same evening—whether he should go to see Edith whilst he was in town, as he had conditionally promised to do—whether he should remain in London three weeks, as he had intended, or return to Ernsford Court the next morning.

The mind sometimes seems to decide questions by unconscious reasoning: it goes

through the process in a sort of intellectual fog, which prevents its being recognised. It is to be supposed that Rupert's mind went through a process of this kind, for he indefinitely concluded to see Edith the next morning, to remain in London for the time intended, and to go to Molini's that same evening — which he did soon after nine o'clock.

There was, as Molini had said, no party : about a dozen people were there—some in morning, some in evening dresses. An Italian violinist, recently arrived in England, was playing a selection from *La Sonnambula* with all the sentiment which an Italian artist has most eminently, if he be not below mediocrity. He was accompanied on the piano by the mysterious model.

"But who is she?—you have not told me," said Rupert, as he shook hands with Molini.

"A friend of mine knew her when she was a child," he replied. "She lives at

Notting Hill. I think that she . . . But let me introduce you: you told me you wanted to know her two years ago."

"But *what* do you think?" said Rupert. "You began to say something, and——"

"Oh! it was nothing. . . . By and by," answered Molini, walking straight up to Caterina, who had just finished accompanying the violinist.

It was now too late to press for the remainder of the sentence, for the room was small, and Molini's voice sonorous. Rupert was introduced when at a distance of three or four yards from her; and there was nothing to be done but to make the best or the worst of the opportunity that he had so much wished for two years before.

Three things were apparent concerning her. First, she was very certainly the lady whom he had seen in Kensington Gardens, and in searching for whom he had well-nigh been brought into the presence of Lady Goodwin and Miss Twinbriggles;

Secondly, she was very certainly beautiful and fascinating—even more so than she had appeared to be two years before; Thirdly, she was very certainly in a false position. But there was something else now observable in her countenance—something that Rupert could not decipher, because he had narrowed his own sympathies by morbid self-containment. That something was made up of less dissatisfaction, greater requirement, less sorrow, more resentfulness, less love, more tact. The general impression on his mind was a painful one, but he was not aware that it was so; it lost its individuality among other painful impressions.

He talked to her for some time: she sang: he talked to her again. Her singing was artistic, and her conversation clever; but in both, nature rather than masters had most instructed her. When Rupert was introduced, she looked at him for a short second with a quick, strong, comprehensive gaze, and said:—

"I have now the opportunity of thanking you for picking up my child's hat when it blew off in Kensington Gardens two years ago. There is some strange affinity between Kensington Gardens and myself: it is there that the eventful passages of my uneventful life happen. Mr. Molini took my picture in Kensington Gardens—at least he went home and painted it. . . . But the strangest adventure of all happened the autumn before last, when my child fell into the water, or rather the stupid nurse threw him into it in trying to get him away, and a young lady who was standing by pulled him out. Whilst I was thanking her an older lady came up, and they went away together. I have no idea who they were. . . . I walk there nearly every day, between breakfast and luncheon."

It was at this moment that she was asked to sing. After having sung, she talked for a few minutes to him and one or two other people, sang once more, and went away.

Rupert left soon afterwards, and walked homewards, meditating on the sayings, doings, appearance and possible history of the mysterious model.

To be told by a beautiful woman that she had remembered him two years after a momentary interview, is an incident calculated to heighten a man's estimate of the said beautiful woman, and modify his criticism. Be he a woman-hater, or a positive and exclusive lover of one woman—be he clothed in self-sufficiency, or denuded by diffidence—he can no more help feeling more or less gratified by the recollection, than Mr. Graham could help being made to feel uncomfortable by the bluntness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins (*vide* Vol. 1).

Therefore Rupert remembered the agreeable, rather than the disagreeable part of the dual impression which Caterina Guarini had made upon him whilst he was in her presence in Molini's house. With this

impression he walked home, and with the same he rose on the following morning.

He was just in the state of mind apt to be produced by reaction from intolerance: he was beginning to tolerate negatively, and without as much intention as is required to keep discrimination going.

With half intention, he set forth between twelve and one o'clock to call on Edith. He found her just coming out of the house to drive in an open carriage which was at the door. When she caught sight of him she turned pale, said a few words falteringly, and added evidently without definite intention, yet evidently with indefinite impulsion:—

“Will you drive with me . . . as far as you like to go? I am going to breathe the fresh air in the park before it becomes full of carriages.”

After a moment's hesitation, more mechanical than real, Rupert handed her into

the carriage, and got in. Edith was nervous and reserved; she spoke little, and when she did speak, only passed over the surface of general topics. As they entered Hyde Park, an open carriage passed, drawn by four of Mr. Newman's post-horses, and filled outside and in by six men with six blue veils, six racing glasses, and one common face among them. Edith almost involuntarily turned away her head, as she recognised her husband among them: she turned from the sight with a shudder of contempt, such as even staggered Rupert in his yet unmodified resentment, and sent a momentary thrill of horror through him. What shall be said of the husband who, having caused it, sees it without shuddering at himself and what he has done?

They drove on without speaking, as far as the end of the carriage drive. As the carriage turned by the gate leading into Kensington Gardens, Edith's countenance assumed a peculiar expression, half plain-

tive, half reckless. Rupert looked round, and saw, walking within the railings, the mysterious model. They drove back in silence half the length of the carriage-drive, when Edith said, rather suddenly,—

“Will you come and see me to-morrow morning, or dine with me to-morrow? There will be no party — only one or two people. Yes, do come and dine to-morrow, at eight. My head aches so, that I can stay out here no longer. I had hoped the air would have cured my headache.”

At Grosvenor Gate Rupert got out, accepting her renewed invitation for the following day.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the following day Rupert dined, as he had promised, with Lord Ravensdale; and never did host and guest less observe in spirit the laws of hospitality.

Rupert really had not known how unmitigated was his resentment, till he found himself in the dining-room and sickened at the idea of breaking bread in the house of a man whom he intensely longed to seize by the throat. In successive pictures the image of his brother rose up before him in imagination — as in the court-yard at Ernsford, when he first returned from Carlsbad — as in London, when returning from Molini's studio — as in the old gallery, after Edith's last visit there — as sculptured in marble on the altar-tomb.

And before Lord Ravensdale rose the

memory-picture of Carlsbad and the things connected with it in his mind, as previously and subsequently. But more particularly there rose before him his meeting with Edgar Ernsford at the angle of the mountain road, because Rupert's likeness to him, as he had appeared at that moment, was so startling as to seem almost supernatural—even to a man incapable of imagining, scarcely capable of believing,* and incompletely capable of self-convicting.

The likeness *was* startling to him, and *did* seem to him almost supernatural.

He was incapable of imagining; but the picture actually before him made bare memory take the hue of imagination. He was scarcely capable of believing; but the startling likeness produced by the actual scene and the remembered one confused the actual and the remembered, so that

* I do not use the word theologically, but in its widest signification. Does not moral relaxation include relaxation of the power to believe anything absolutely and with heartiness?

the possible grew larger, and its confines more obscure. He was incompletely capable of self-convicting; but the remembered scene included those means, of doubtful warrantability, by which it was brought about. Briefly, it may be said, that the semi-vital surface of his inert conscience experienced a feeling of irritation during a short period.

But these things pass off much less evidently than they appear to the reader, who stands behind the scenes. Probably not one of the eight unobservant people who made up the party to eleven, remarked that anything was noticeable.

Edith was yet more influenced by the resemblance; it seemed to spell-bind her, and take the life out of volition. But neither was that noticed definitely by any one of the eight unobservant people who made up the number of the party to eleven.

Rupert's mind was noticeably in a state

of such complex discord as can only exist where there are materials for complex harmony ; but neither the actual nor the conditional reached the understandings of the eight.

Wonderful is the unobservancy, unappreciativeness and unimpressionability of people who have nothing else to do but to observe, appreciate and be impressed. If the "hand of little employment hath the daintier sense" — as it has, or the words would not be Shakespeare's — not so the mind of little employment, which, like an unexercised body, loses its muscle, and grows flabby. If those eight non-professional people had been devoted to literature, science, art, works of charity, or country interests, they would have had several more chances of seeing something ; but they chanced to be as follows :—

Four dull lamb's-wool-working ladies ; one fast ditto ; two younger sons who had the misfortune to have been left twenty thou-

sand pounds while minors; one elderly gentleman, with sharply-cut whiskers, whose share in society's division of labour was twofold, viz. to know what was in the second edition of the *Times*, and to be a scavenger of club gossip, dining-room gossip, House of Commons gossip, and all other gossip circulating within the west end of London. Therefore Lord Ravensdale, Lady Ravensdale, and Rupert were severally allowed to be uncomfortable, without being stared at—a small boon, perhaps, but a boon indisputable.

At about eleven o'clock there was—first a sudden silence, then a movement, then a low hum among those eight component parts of the dinner-party. Rupert also rose to leave.

“Are you going to Lady Rossden's ball to-night?” said Edith, who could think of nothing else to say, as he stood opposite her, preparing to go, but not going.

"I received an invitation the other day," he answered. "It was forwarded to me at Ernsford. I never go to balls now. . . . I shall know nobody."

After this reply, it need scarcely be said that he went to the ball.

Lady Julia Perringston was, as usual, conspicuous for the dissimilarity of her manners to those of her graceful mother and not ungraceful sister. As Rupert passed her she turned round and shook hands, with that transverse jerk which was her custom, talking to some one else all the while, and dividing what she said between the two.

"Mrs. Grahame looks like a toad, up in the corner there," she said; "there, in a brownish grey dress, and with a diamond tiara."

"Is that because she is 'ugly and venomous, and has a precious jewel in her head?'" answered Rupert, with an expression of unenjoying humour on his countenance.

Lady Julia understood the abusive epithets, but not the point of them ; albeit Miss Donaldson had often made her learn the whole passage backwards and forwards, and parse it in French.

"How delightfully spiteful you have grown !" she said. "Je vous en fais mes compliments—"

"—Not on the score of originality or rareness of the quality," said Rupert.

She put on the angular smile which preheralds an ill-bred, tactless, and unfeminine speech from one of that class of fast young ladies who wear their hats shelving forward from the occiput, and replied :

"Perhaps not ; but at least it was unexpected. I thought you had a kind of filial affection for her . . . I thought at least you were going to have — two years ago."

"You are thinking of your brother, not of me, I believe," said Rupert, in the most disagreeable tone possible within the strict bounds of courtesy.

"Anger — more on my own account than I properly acknowledged, vented in a mongrel pun abusive of Mrs. Grahame — I can't admire myself for it," thought he, as he turned from her.

He walked away, in a frame of mind that had become more and more exceptional during the past year: it lasted now just as long as it took him to cross the room and hope that Constance would not leave it on purpose to avoid him. During that very short period he mistrusted his present self, and the likeness between him and his brother was unusually remarkable.

"But what was Constance really doing at that moment, and habitually since he had last seen her? Was she living on the poison-food of hope deferred till its bloom was worn away? Or was she fixing her eyes gloomily on the alternative future, till its discordant hues were softened by custom?

The same question arises tacitly before

us too often — oftener than we know of, or a lighted ball-room would be a place of sadder suggestiveness than it is ; but who shall answer it when it arises — who distinguish where the symptoms are the same — who read the explanatory future before the sequel has unfolded it ? As in life, so in its histories, truth must unwind at its own pace.

She came, and went, and came again, to and from that and other rooms in that house. He spoke to her — talked with her ; but of what avail are opportunities, when a shadow is before them, and the person at whose disposal they lie open ?

The ball was, in other and all respects, similar to other balls of its class and period. There were people decidedly within the limits of the set assumed to be theirs ; people offered for acceptance, with various probabilities or improbabilities of remaining in it eventually ; people who had taken insecure root on the frontiers ; people who

had ramified from the centre ; people who had only a local claim, and never would take root at all in the thing which those peopled rooms then represented. There were amusing people, and dull people ; amused people, and unamusable people ; hard workers, and unreciprocating consumers. There were acquaintances by position, and acquaintances by inheritance ; acquaintances in virtue of fortuitous circumstances, and acquaintances in virtue of personal qualities ; acquaintances resulting from pertinacity, and acquaintances resulting from merit, literary, artistic and otherwise.

There were foreigners of various kinds and ranks — foreigners political, foreigners diplomatic, foreigners literary, foreigners scientific, foreigners artistic, foreigners not included in any of the above-named items. Last, but not least, in this imperfect catalogue, come one or two people who, from no very apparent cause, had “ got in ” since two years before. Among these were our

esteemed friends "the slapping fine woman" and the caterpillar. The former had made herself friends of the Gallic mammon during two winters in Paris: the latter had half ruined his mother and destroyed the prospect of his sister, in order to set up a stud of hunters at Melton. The hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper were living at Boulogne.

In the two years which had passed since the course of this story last flowed through the shifting scenes of a ball-room, the death of Edgar was apparently the only event which had rippled its current. Nothing more was visible to that large class represented by the eight unobservant people erewhile noticed.

Lord Sevenoaks had continued and did continue with mild persistency his very sincere addresses to Constance, who had continued and did continue with strong persistency to repel him, without letting him see that she was doing so. This inert and responseless courtship was the only

one addressed, during that period, to Constance — the harmoniously beautiful in mind and body. Is this incredible? Rather is it one of those difficult problems of social life which require a different solution for each example, and seem to defy general rules. Perhaps the general definition most charitable to the world and most intelligible to the reader would be this:—

There are women who are very much admired after, and very little before, they are married, because their characteristic attractions belong to themselves — not to their girlhood. Constance was signally one of these. If we add to this the insensible repulsion that hedges round a heart secretly preoccupied, reasons, if not to spare, will perhaps be sufficient for the purpose.

Mrs. Grahame had been improved by the chastening of disappointment. She was one of those whose moral constitution is benefited by lowering; she no longer thought that the acute Dowager was a “nasty old

thing ;” she wished that she had followed the spirit of her advice — wished it from awakening consciousness of right as much as from interested motives.

Mr. Grahame still regretted definitely, hoped indefinitely, and remembered as vividly as ever the bluntness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, who, bluff as ever, was also at Lady Rossden’s ball. Sir John Campion had gone into the country the day before — as mentioned in the penultimate chapter, which also told of his sayings and doings, as the last did of Edith’s. “The slapping fine woman” thought much better of “fine ladies” since they had admitted her into their houses. Baron von Platchfusz, who was also there, had lately been superintending a translation of his commentary on the Sylloge Scriptorum, &c. &c. &c.

Count Schönbeck was there, quite prepared to offer himself again as a matrimonial candidate for Edith, if haply Lord Ravensdale should break his neck in re-

turning from the Derby, and she prove to have retained her own fortune. The Griffin was at Spa.

Walking through the rooms — talking to several of the above-named and other people, or rather being talked to by them — avoiding Constance, and yet following her distantly — so Rupert passed the first three-quarters of an hour. The next half hour he passed in conversation with Edith, if that can be called conversation which was but an inconsequent sequence of remarks separated by long intervals, during which neither seemed at ease, yet neither seemed able to move away. At last several itinerant human bodies interposed between them, and they separated. Rupert next found himself face to face with Constance. Is it incredible that a man of strong reason, sensation and individuality should miserably hover between half-a-dozen different feelings, and let resolve grow weak by subdivision? Or rather, was not life to Rupert

like a labyrinth with one clue which he had let go, and might or might not find again?

Can personal influence be computed from the measure of its shadow on the path we are crossing?

He stood by her, and spoke to her; but the words he said were common-place to the verge of absurdity, and, such as they were, seemed to be out of his control. Was this the magic spell of reciprocation? or the impulse of self-reproach for inconstant Will concerning her? or a half successful attempt at self-evasion? or the clash of two or three feelings struggling in the dark?

Who shall tell the direction of the wind by watching its eddies among the chimney stacks? Who shall tell the set of the tide by looking at a whirlpool? Who shall tell the prevailing bias of a mind by contemplating the circles of unfinished and contradictory intentions in a man's mind when he is sternly irresolute? And whatever was the prevailing bias of Rupert's

mind at that time, it was the more improbable of discovery, by reason of the shortness of the time allowed for it: he had not stood beside her two minutes, when there came and stood between them "the slapping fine woman," who looked sideways at Rupert, and made a sort of suggestive movement that might be owned or repudiated as a bow, according to its reception. Rupert had never seen her before, but he had retained, amid all his morbidness of mind, one healthy spot—courtesy to woman; therefore he bowed, without that gesture of interrogation which renders a bow as much more offensive than none, as rudeness is more offensive than neglect.

The "slapping fine woman," who, by reason of the constant movement of her eyes, face, and shoulders, appeared to be three or four slapping fine women, shook hands expansively with Constance, and said in a strong whisper:—

"My dear Miss Grahame, it's an age

since I have seen you. Do you know, I heard you were going to be . . . Well, not just now. But *do* tell me . . . I thought Lord Elfintower had died; but isn't that him?"

Every syllable of the strong whisper was overheard by Rupert. Before Constance could reply, he had vanished, and was making the best of his way outwards.

Shall we say that this accidental combination of circumstances not only caused him to turn away from her sooner than he had intended, but, in doing so, prevented a mutual recognition of their inner selves, and altered the current of probabilities? If it was not so, there are at least abundant precedents to prove that it might have been. The details of the visible world are carried out by miracles, unnoticed because daily before our eyes; and human life can show, if we search for them, incidents more coincidental than lie patent in the invented drama.

CHAPTER V.

A CHAPTER EXPLANATORY AND CONDUCTIVE.

RUPERT remained in London, but he went no more into ladies' society: he now and then had a polyglot male dinner-party at Greenwich, and he never put on an evening dress except for the opera. Thither he went frequently, as frequently met Edith, and as frequently passed more or less time in her box.

We all have read that "the web of our life is of a mingled yarn—good and ill together." We accept the dictum on the authority of its mighty author, and on that of our own experience; but when it comes to practical instances, we give preponderating attention to one or other set of threads.

And so it would be with most of us if

we were appraising an Edith and a Rupert of flesh and blood.

Of Edith one person would say—

“Don’t tell *me*! I remember her ever since she came out. No one could have done anything with *her*. Lord Ravensdale would have done very well if he had married differently. I wonder he puts up with the way she goes on. It’s all nonsense,” &c. &c. &c.

Whereas another would say—

“It’s all those nasty dowagers*, and their spiteful envy. I hate hypocrisy and humbug. It was all her mother—I know all about it. I was there at the time, and saw it all going on—everybody knew it at the

* Ill fares it with dowagers in 1861. Whatever their offences may have been, their present expiation is, to stand unwilling sponsors for every social disorder, and be answerable for every ill-assorted marriage, every broken-off marriage, every marriage that possibly might have been, but was not, and every non-matrimonial brougham that drives through Hyde Park! It is well that their average breadth of shoulder is not inconsiderable, for truly the burden is great.

time. *He* ought to have taken better care, and not have gone away when he did; everybody knew that—of course they did. It's all very well to talk about vows and altars, and all that sort of thing; but you can't expect that a woman with any feeling in her will go on for ever in that way. I daresay you'll be very much shocked at me; but *I* think, do you know, that we are too straight-laced. . . . And it's all humbug; it only makes the hypocrites have it all their own way. It's all nonsense," &c. &c. &c.

But none perhaps would say—

"I honour those who endure and resist; endurance and resistance are the great lessons to be studied through life. I mourn for those who turn back from the ordeal, and I sympathise with *them*—not with their non-endurance and non-resistance. Great was the evil influence brought to bear upon her by her mother at Carlsbad.—It was great in itself, and greater still by reason

of the fact that it was put forth without evil intent — for evil advice given in a spirit of affection combines the forces of good and evil. But greater yet, if she had searched its vastness, was the good influence that waited in all its beauty and power for acceptance. Honestly and in a spirit of self-condemnation I sympathise with Edith, and sorrow for the unrest that presides over her being: and I hope, not passively, but actively — hope in the spirit that sets in motion words and deeds of its own tendency: but distinctly apart from this, I see, recognise, and acknowledge the separable acts — see them face to face without artificial colouring, and acknowledge them in distinct terms without diminution of their meaning.”

None, perhaps, would say this.

None, perhaps, would simultaneously feel her sorrows, her womanhood, and the fascination of her beauty, and grieve definitely over the unbeautiful deviations that marred their loveliness.

Of Rupert some would say —

“He’s an ill-conditioned *vaurien* — you might have seen long ago how he was likely to turn out. One never can trust a man who begins life without sowing any wild oats — he’s sure to run a mucker in the end. And what did he do two years ago? Didn’t he *all but* propose to his cousin, and then run half over London, looking for a model, or some one he had seen by chance? And what is he doing now? Why, he’s actually flirting conspicuously with the other sister — the very girl that *was* to have married his brother, but threw him over, and (they say) killed him — but I don’t believe *that*. And there he * is now! It’s all nonsense,” &c. &c. &c.

Whereas others would say —

“It’s all very well to find fault with him, and tell me platitudes about what he ought to do; but what can you expect? It was only a boyish fancy; he had seen

* *I. e.* Rupert. Ed.

nothing then. I don't suppose he knew his own mind; and he was snubbed by her mother; and *she** didn't care—or wouldn't show she did—or was afraid—or *something*.† If he had known his own mind, why of course he wouldn't have been put off by such a woman as Mrs. Grahame.‡ And what harm is he doing now, I should like to know? If *she* chooses to encourage him, why, upon my soul, I really can't see It's all nonsense," &c. &c. &c.

But none perhaps would say, "Heavy

* *I.e.* Constance. Ed.

† Probably the reader will not deny the general proposition conveyed in this term of wide significance. Ed.

‡ If the two last sentences *do* seem rather contradictory of each other, they are significant of the two ideas probably consequent in the mind of a man taking up an "easy-going" line of defence for Rupert. The first indicates the primary impulse—that of ascribing matrimonial failures exclusively to the lady and her mother: the second indicates the secondary impulse—that of making the contemplation of the grievance a pleasurable emotion by introducing therein the element of contempt.

in the balance weighs the quiet tragedy begun at Carlsbad — heavy each consequent event, whether affecting him through self or sympathy—but heavier yet the offered influences that lie wasting. Will those offered influences turn the scale or not ?”

I have given words to the spirit of what *is not said* — what I humbly conceive *ought* to be said. I have given words to the spirit of what I believe would be said — nay more, of what *is* said every day of cases that are in spirit similar. And herein predominates the evidence of that general bias which excuses Rupert more than Edith, or (more definitely) excuses him for his own sake, and her for his.

But all this, however sound abstractedly, is, in respect of its present application, as unsound as the floating gossip it assumes to represent. Like the thing it represents, it builds its own theories on unproved data—how else could it be a repre-

sensation of that thing? Taking, therefore, the foregoing remarks on intersexual equity as abstract ideas, ready made to fit innumerable cases that are waiting for them, let us see how much or how little they apply to the two people for whom I have respectively invoked the spirits of gossip and of justice.

They only apply to them as cautions against things possible apply to the cautioned. When there are plausible possibilities of evil-doing, the abstract and the concrete melt into one by force of repeated suggestion.

Gossip germinates in a barren soil, and its roots ramify downwards.

But what were these two people, Rupert and Edith, really saying and doing, that gossip, conjectural of the one, and depreciative of the other, should germinate at all? Little enough that was audible or visible—much that was perceptible—more that was mistakeable.

It was audible, and visible, that they said very little to each other — that what they said was commonplace — that they were not oftener together than their relationship and early intimacy would have warranted — that, when together the manner of both was stiff, rather than the reverse. It was perceptible, that their silence was absolute and communicative, rather than negative and intransitive — that their commonplace remarks had a borrowed power, and that their meetings, if not more frequent, were more important than there was open warrant for. It was mistakeable, that there was unmistakably working between them an occult influence, previously non-existent.

But what was that occult influence? Did it flow from love or hate absolutely, or any of the passion-streams that branch off from those two great present sources of joy and woe? It flowed from both — and the dissimilar streams mingled where they

met in a strong, smooth current: they mingled where they met — but, before the current was reached, the waters had been ruffled and lost their translucency.

If it be objected that I am hair-splitting, I can only plead that it is not possible to describe extraordinary combinations of circumstances by ordinary combinations of words. But I will conclude the subject in terms as matter-of-fact and prosaic as will barely suffice to explain things essentially the reverse.

When a woman loves with the full force of her nature, and any weakness inherent or casual, causes the non-fulfilment of her true destiny, the force with which she loved will make that unfulfilled destiny be ever present to her own overheated imagination, while the weakness that caused its non-fulfilment will render it morbid and liable to abstraction. In saying this I but epitomise Edith's history. A morbid abstraction and a memory-portrait now re-

presented the last scene in the old gallery : in Rupert's person that memory-portrait seemed to her not to start, but to *have* started into life.

In that impersonation there was an occult influence which leads the inquiry to the impersonator.

Was Rupert anything more in this than an involuntary impersonator of his brother? I think not — unless there be such a thing as an involuntary exercise of Will.

But to a mind diseased as Edith's there is a serpent-like fascination in being hated ; and there was more hatred in Rupert's heart than was consistent with his abstract spirit of forbearance to women. So does the consistent foul fiend smear the contiguous outlines of good and evil.

But what harm was he doing ? For none has yet been shown of him, though much has been apparently hinted. The answer is, that he was letting calumny go for truth by default. But whence the calumny ?

From causes almost as various as the sources through which it oozed in slimy streamlets. Two or three of them are evident and sufficient.

Lord Ravensdale was one of those men who have not the manliness to accept the character which they have openly avowed. To him reservation was the principle—declaration the subordinate idea. He seldom, if ever, affirmed a definite and confrontable untruth, but his whole life was an exhalation of plausible falsehood. His selfishness in the pursuit of his propensities gained him the character of impulsiveness, together with all the privileges and immunities thereto accorded by the body social: his secretiveness gained him the credit of good intentions.

The antithesis of this would go far to describe his wife comparatively with himself. She declared everything—more than everything, either by words or implication. She kept up plausible appearances against her-

self, and reserved nothing except that which would tell in her own favour. Her instincts were for truth, but the falseness of her position cast its own shadow over them. She felt that falseness of position the more intensely because she had not chosen it according to her own definite wish, but permitted it in a spirit of culpable weakness. She had indulged a vague, self-containing, unsympathising contemplation of her own fate, till its origin was lost in a sense of personal wrong that went far to exclude all sense of self-blame. She seemed to have neither strength enough to grapple, resignation to submit, nor apathy to be satisfied. Her indifference in tolerating attentions gained her the character of a systematic and general flirt: her unconcealed fits of abstraction were taken as individual cases of something worse. Her success in the world had been sufficient to rouse its jealousy — her sympathy with it insufficient to cause its forbearance. Had

she been more positively good, or definitely bad, she would, in the one case, have claimed respect — in the other, have canvassed for sympathy: but she put in a weak, unbacked, friendless claim for both, and stirred the mud of criticism without getting into its stream.

Hence the world supported him, and condemned her — condemned her for what it did and did not see and hear — condemned her for what was, or seemed to be — condemned her by hypothetical anticipation. It supported him by reason of custom, prejudice, self-interest, uninquiring conviction, supposed self-protection. It compounded for much objectionable toleration of others by intolerant whispers and predictions, which it placed to the credit of its own moral consciousness. It felt unkindly towards her, and all the while half believed that it was pitying.

All this was but a murmur so slight, that the act of listening made its existence

seem doubtful. It made no difference in the manner of her reception, nor took one name from her visiting book. No one accused her of anything — there was nothing to accuse her of: no one looked colder upon her — they had never received her with heart-warmth. She had become the fashion by conspicuous beauty and by wit that did not overshoot the average comprehension of the drawing-room public: she still retained it by the tenacity of custom.

Thus end together the chapter and one calendar month from the date of Sir John Campion's conference at Notting Hill. I hope that the former will be deemed explanatory: I am very sure that the latter is conducive to the 1st of July —

CHAPTER VI.

AND to Kensington Gardens — which Rupert entered between the hours of twelve and one. He came in by one of the northern gates, and walked on at a varying pace. The course he took was as varying as his pace: his manner was searchful: his countenance indicated self-avoidance.

The day was intensely close: the sun heated but did not warm the inert mass of vapour that made the air stagnant. Rupert relaxed his pace, and, turning his head as if to face the breeze that had not been during the last half hour, drew a long breath, and said to himself, as if in spite of himself:

“I can’t breathe freely. This hot fog

seems to force back my breath. I never felt so oppressed before."

He walked on, and presently stood by the water. Here he stood for several minutes, and at length began to think aloud as before — that is, the thoughts and their audible expression seemed to form themselves in spite of perverted volition.

"This, I suppose," he said, "is the spot where she saved the child — it *must be her*, by the description. . . . She saved that child's little ill-omened life from being quenched like a rushlight: she would have saved Edith—saved God only knows what, if Edith would have let her, or if some demon-spell had not deadened her heart and her comprehension — for I could almost fancy something of the sort. . . . Can she save me? A woman can make or mar a man, if her influence is assured and exclusive But there *is* a state of mind in which *yes* and *no* bear the semblance of convertible terms, and impres-

sions become indistinguishable. I would that I were able to distinguish: I would that I were able to *will* as I ought: I reproach myself for not doing so—as though assured of its being in my power to do it: but my will, like a disordered machine, is too strong and too weak for any good purpose. . . . I think that the better part of me is in as great danger of being quenched as was the physical existence of that little child; but can she do to me likewise? Am I able to enable her to do it, supposing she should have the wish and the power?”

He stopped, and looked around him; the movement was sudden, jerky, nervous—as of one whose eyes meet, or search for, some one desired with a disallowed reservation. He looked around him a second time; the movement was the same, but his eyes had changed their colour to a lighter shade, and their look was indefinite. He walked on again—changing his direction more

than once: he soliloquised no more, but the expression of his countenance indicated that his self-avoidance was less tumultuous and more successful than before. Something seemed to have gained an ascendancy.

By the time he had thus proceeded about two hundred yards, a lady, walking by, bowed to him slightly but decidedly. He made the motion of looking up, and took off his hat to Caterina Guarini.

She did not stop, but allowed him to stop her, which he did with an awkwardness significantly incompatible with his natural address.

"Don't you find the air very oppressive this morning?" he said, after a pause as awkward as the address.

"I am used to it," she replied. "I have not slept out of London these two years."

Sadness was the dominant expression in her voice: bitterness lurked beneath: harshness would have marred one of a quality less beautiful. Her brow was overcast — not

incidentally, but by accumulation. Her manner was both exclusive and permissive. Rupert searched during the next half minute for something to say, but could find nothing better than an interrogative paraphrase of her last sentence.

"And you have really not been out of London for two years?" he said, digging his cane three or four inches into the turf.

"Nearer two years and a half," she replied. "I remain here even through the hot fogs in August and September, when there is no one in the streets except flies and foreign emigrants."

Rupert began to detect within himself a dormant wish to be somewhere else. He began to feel that he was not only dissatisfied with himself, but must necessarily continue to be so whichever course he adopted. It is needless to add that he said the wrong thing.

"One meets more of one's friends in London," he said.

"I have no friends. A woman has no

friend when she is wronged," answered Caterina, in a tone of ascendant humility.

Each time that she spoke, the difficulty of answering her became greater; so that the most ostensible remedy was to prolong the sentence in hand by as many renewals as possible. But this is a thing easier to suggest retrospectively than to do under the pressure of the immediate alternative—easier still to commence successfully than to maintain during a slow and circuitous progress from the centre of Kensington Gardens to its most remote entrance gate.

The sun, too, had by this time partially illumined the stagnant atmosphere with a dazzling white light that heated the hot air without drying it—a circumstance not favourable to the clarification of a puzzled brain. Rupert looked wishfully at the nearest clump of trees, and said—

"I am afraid it's too true." This expression of his views he repeated so much more than once, that it really seemed to call

for some acknowledgment from Caterina. She remained silent for a few seconds; and averting her head, as if communing with herself in exclusive solitude of spirit, answered —

“ You are the only person who has ever responded to that querulous cry of despair which, I am afraid, has become habitual with me.”

Rupert retired within himself, to repair the mischief done to his own self security; but he did no more than verify the damages, and resent, without acknowledging, the rottenness of the thing damaged.

The assertion that one is the only, or the first, person who does or is anything, implies a compliment or its opposite — there is no middle interpretation: and the best method of distinguishing which, is to notice the emphasis on the syllables. For instance:

1st. You are the *first person* who ever said that.

2nd. You are the **FIRST** person who ever said **THAT**.

3rd. You are the first person who ever said **THAT**.

In No. 1 the slight emphasis on the two sequent words, "first" and "person" indicates that the speaker is impressed with your superior idiosyncrasy; it denotes that the impression will be an abiding one; it suggests the idea of an involuntary acknowledgment of merit, rather than a complimentary remark.

In No. 2 the strong emphasis on the word "first," and the absence of emphasis on the word "person," shows that the thing you have said is your only title to notice, which, the emphasised "that," plainly tells you is protestant, ironical, and indignant.

In No. 3 the hurried, slurring, unaccented run of all but the last strongly emphasised word, shows that what you have said is too objectionable to go by without a

protest, and you too contemptible even for numerical notice.

But when a beautiful woman, whom you know to have been injured in the cruellest manner in the most vulnerable point, says to you, in a voice whose rich inflexions suggest in a heart-touching antithesis the picture of what she is, and what she might be —“You are the ONLY *person* who ever responded to that querulous cry of *despair*, which, I am afraid, has become habitual with me.” What then,—if you are young in years, and low, for your years, in the school of life—if you are ardent in soul and temperament, chivalrous by nature and habit—if you have been fuelling your ardent nature to an unnatural state of continuous, still excitement, and silencing the clear tones of self-reproach in the bagpipe-drone of resentment? What then? I trow you will be in danger of using up your available supply of sympathy, and making up the deficiency at the expense of others —

As Rupert did — feeling all the while equal proportions of anger against himself and the general public.

It has been said, that he retired within himself for a given purpose in which he signally failed: it remains to be seen what he did when silence had become more oppressive than the fear of its alternative.

He bent back his riding whip in the muscular expression of abstract resistance: it slipped through his fingers at the thin end, and hit him across the cheek with all the multiplied force of a rebound. The circumstance created a sensation in his cheek, if not in the minds of his unobservant co-pedestrians in Kensington Gardens; and it also stimulated his faculties, insomuch that, without further delay, he commenced the following dialogue:—

Rupert. “I am the *only* person? The world is even worse than I thought it.”

Caterina. “It is difficult for a noble nature to comprehend the feelings and

motives that actuate the selfish, and those to whom malignity is an enjoyment."

Rupert. "I suppose it is; I suppose it must be; I—I suppose so. I might have known, too."

Caterina. "I think not that is, unless, like myself, you had come in contact with them."

Rupert (half annoyed that any doubt should be cast upon his experience of evil). "I am afraid I *have* come into contact with them."

Caterina. "But you have not been jostled by them at every step; you have not been thrown with *them*, and none besides; you have not been reminded of . . . of humiliation daily and hourly by them; you have not inhaled their poisonous breaths with the very air you breathed; you have not been compelled to fix your eyes upon evil, till you closed them at length in horror, and tried to think it was not so. You have not been cast into *that* pit of darkness."

Rupert. "Not so complete as to exclude
——"

Caterina. "*I have and if I speak bitterly, it is the accumulation of five years that makes me do so——*"

Rupert. "It cannot but be so——"

Caterina. "The wear and tear of sufferance; the struggle between the impulse of a pure and holy feeling, and the evidence of its consequence; the bitter awakening to the certainty that that pure and holy feeling would never be legitimised; and the yet more bitter awakening to the truth, that I must mourn it as an involuntary sin, *but not as a lost love—the truth that that I had sacrificed . . . all to an ideal which (I had thought) was personified in the only almost the only man I had ever spoken with since I had grown up.*"

Rupert (with a sudden change of countenance—as if a parallel had flashed across his mind). "It is more bitter—that misapplied intensity, which gnaws itself even to

annihilation when that intensity is not reciprocated."

Catertna. "You speak with the fervour of one who has personified an ideal, and ——"

Rupert. "Been disenchanted. Yes: I have been decei——"

The magnitude of the lie he was about to utter staggered him, though he did all he could to avoid seeing it. Try as he would, the second syllable refused to pass his lips. The hot blood came and went quick and tingling in his forehead. He stood forth, a miserable example of meanness entering into a fine nature and assimilating there.

So passed—in tumultuous silence on the one side, and strongly sustained silence on the other, a period as long as it took them to walk about one hundred and fifty yards at the slowest practicable pace.

The struggle between the sun and the stagnant vapour had ended in the present disappearance of the latter; the stagnant va-

pour itself, broken by a few large, warm heat drops, had lost its stagnancy, and floated in sluggish currents; the air felt softer to the surface of the body—cooler to the head.

At or about one hundred and fifty yards from the spot where the second syllable of the word “deceived” had lost its tail, the dialogue thus recommenced:—

Caterina. “How unrivalled are these gardens in their own, or, I could almost say,) in any style—I mean, for a walk within a city. I am so fond of them.”

Rupert. “It is . . . very beautiful: when I really look at it, I see that it is, and that its beauty ought to grow upon me. . . . But I never see it fairly. . . I suppose there are too many impressions on one’s mind at once in this big city. . . . There’s too much confusion of sights and sounds; I—I can’t take in the beauty of this properly.”

Caterina. “Of course not. You have too many distractions while you are in London—and yet not distractions, for you

have no need of them—I mean, rather, occupations; your time is filled to abundance; to *you* this place is but a place of passage, like any street where . . . you may chance to meet a stranger and pass on; to *me* it is an event. . . . *the* event in . . . Yes! it *is* striking—very striking; there is a speciality about it: it has the dignity of age and the poetry of association. The Bois de Boulogne has an unstable look about it: it may be fancy—but I cannot get rid of the idea.”

Rupert. “The wealth which parades itself there is redolent of the *Bourse*, where much of it is made with very suspicious rapidity.”

Caterina. “And in the past one is reminded of *Manon Lescaut*—that cleverly written yet repulsive glorification of unfaithfulness.”

Again silence was fallen back upon by the one, and sustained by the other, whilst they traversed another hundred and fifty yards of turf. Rupert wished that he had

not come to Kensington Gardens on that morning, but he could not quite manage to wish that he could get away now. The dialogue thus again proceeded:

Caterina. "What I like so much in this place is the home-like expression that pervades it. What I mean is: In this part of the gardens, where we are now, and where I almost always walk, most of the people one sees have the manner of being not merely out of doors, but from *home*. The whole thing, scenery and all, is genuinely English—and I am more English than my appearance would lead you to suppose I am half English by birth, and yet more so in my feelings and inclinations."

Rupert was silent, and thought (but not aloud) as follows:

"And she retains, amid her crushing disadvantages—trials—temptations—the feelings and instincts of a woman and a wife And Const——"

As when erewhile the second syllable of

the word *deceived* lost its tail in the attempt to force itself into the wrong place, so now the magnitude of the lie he was about to utter before his own soul, staggered him even in his secret thoughts, and drove him to expedients, more or less mean, whereby to make out a case for himself to his own conscience.

They traversed about forty yards of turf, and the silence was thus broken :

Caterina. "How much beauty there is among Englishwomen !"

Rupert. "Yes ; an immense average of moderate beauty — the beauty of youth, complexion and womanhood."

Caterina. "But there is more than that — far more ; indeed there is."

Rupert. "Yes ; but not in such numbers."

Caterina. "There was a face that struck me very much in a portrait of Molini's the evening I had the pleasure of meeting you there first. I forgot to ask him

who it was: it stood upon a table near the piano. Do you happen to know who she was?"

Rupert. "Lady a —— Lady what's her name?"

Caterina. "I beg your pardon?"

Rupert. "Lady Ravensdale."

Caterina (in a voice of controlment),
"Lady Ravensdale? Poor woman!"

Rupert. "My natural impulse would be to think so; but . . . not in *her* case."

Caterina. "In her case you ought in justice ——"

Rupert. "No! if you knew ——"

Caterina. "I *do* know! but I know more besides. Believe me, she is far more deserving of pity than blame. Rather blame her mother. . . . By the bye, you have a large acquaintance, and can tell me, perhaps, who the young lady was who came to the studio, about ten days ago—just after you left. You must have passed them as you went out."

Rupert. "Miss . . . I don't rememb—I was in a great hurry."

Caterina. "I saw you speak to her coming out of the Opera, last Tuesday—at the foot of the staircase. I passed you just afterwards."

Rupert. Ah! yes. Miss — Miss — Miss . . . I met so many just then."

Caterina. "She was on Lord Seven-oaks' arm. I have *often* seen him join her out riding in the park. Well! whoever she is, she is very handsome — more so than Lady Ravensdale, perhaps; but her expression is less loving — at least it seems so to me. I should think that she had never yet felt very strongly or cared very much for ——"

[A sudden break off, and a pause of about half a minute.]

"Perhaps I am mistaken: very likely — most likely I am. I only noticed her once — when you were speaking to her. She is very beautiful, of a different style—not at

all like Lady Ravensdale . . . her features are more classical ——”

[Another sudden break off, and a pause of about half a minute.]

“What a dreadful fate is Lady Ravensdale’s! . . . I can sympathise with what I have myself experienced. . . . To feel neglect as an injury rather than as a sorrow—to have idealised a deception, and to have *not even one’s own love for it left to cling to*—to have leaned on a bubble, and felt it collapse—to know that there is no future for one, and yet to find in one’s heart’s memory *no past at all*—to be thrown back upon oneself, a living monument of wasting capabilities—to be thought innately bad, till one almost believes oneself to be so, when one is praying day and night for an opportunity to develop the good that is in one—this is a phase in the interior life of woman which a man can hardly conceive in all its horrible details; *but it has produced, it does, and will again produce, imperceptible insanity*

— I mean *those inconsistencies* of impulse and behaviour which meet with no pity, *because the true cause of them is not certified in print and pinned on one's back*. I am not speaking of myself *now*: a dreary blank behind and before me is *my fate*. Besides, I have a duty to live for."

They had now arrived at the gate. She turned to him, bowed dismissively, and said:

"Thank you very much for your agreeable and kind conversation."

She walked quickly away in the direction of Notting Hill. Rupert formed, at one and the same time, two unrecognised and contradictory wishes, which may thus be rendered:

I wish I had not gone to Kensington Gardens.

I wish I might go to Notting Hill.

Thus ended their third peripatetic dialogue in Kensington Gardens, and their fourth meeting since their first at Molini's.

CHAPTER VII.

A FORTNIGHT had passed: the peripatetic dialogue had been three times renewed. Rupert had "never seen so much justness of feeling in the face of the cruellest injustice," — except where he stared without seeing, and took the unobtrusiveness of maidenhood for worldly indifference—

As he did with consistent inconsistency in respect of Constance.

After the dialogue detailed in the last chapter, Rupert had turned back into Kensington Gardens, and through them walked slowly home, reflecting on what had passed, or rather mentally repeating a mass of solemn nonsense, which may be divided into these three classes: —

1. Truths made untrue by position.

2. Untruths apparently true because not fairly looked at.

3. Abstract and concrete exaggerations that plead the cause of untruth in the name of truth.

Briefly it may be said, that he had repeated in self-commune what he had said and thought in Kensington Gardens : briefly it may be added, that in the following fortnight he had accustomed himself to the repetition : briefly it may be super-added, that each interview was the means of adding to the mass of solemn nonsense which loaded his mind.

The fortnight subsequent to the day recorded in the last chapter, brings us at its close to the middle of July.

Sir John Campion had not yet returned. Lord Ravensdale had been driving about several times conspicuously with his wife, and appearing in society with her several times during the past three weeks. Lord Sevenoaks had acquired the habit of joining.

Mr. Grahame and Constance out riding in the Park, at or about twelve o'clock, and Rupert had acquired the habit of passing that way towards Kensington Gardens. Caterina had received a card that Rupert had left one day at her house in Notting Hill. Rupert showed every disposition to continue the mode of life which he had followed almost exclusively of anything else, for a whole month — viz. a listening contemplation of Caterina and an unlistening contemplation of Edith.

Affairs were in this position on the 15th of July, when Rupert was again with Caterina in Kensington Gardens, from twelve to one, and again with Edith at the Opera, from nine to half-past eleven o'clock. Affairs were in the following position on the 16th:—

About eleven o'clock in the morning Rupert was walking through the park on his way to Kensington Gardens; and when passing the spot where idlers most do con-

gregate for the purpose of parading their idleness by leaning over the rails and looking before them with round, self-sufficient, impertinent eyes, he was accosted by two of the fraternity.

The two were acquaintances of his ; but their names have not been transmitted to the compiler of this history. Rupert was detained by them as long as it took three people to say the following :

Omnes. "How are you ?" (a pause.)

First rail-lounger. "What's the best news with you ?"

Rupert. "I don't know."

First rail-lounger. "Hm !"

Second rail-lounger. "Ha !"

First rail-lounger. "Well ? what about what you were telling me ?"

Second rail-lounger. "What, the girl that just passed on a dark chestnut mare ? Miss (turning to Rupert)—— Ain't she some relation of yours ?"

Rupert (boldly taking the benefit of the doubt). "No."

Second rail-lounger. "Miss Grahame, I mean."

Rupert moves slowly onwards.

First rail-lounger. "Who to?"

Second rail-lounger. ". . . Sevenoaks."

Exit Rupert from among the rail-loungers.

First rail-lounger. "Who told you so?"

Second rail-lounger. "His sister was chaffing about it. I don't know that she means much more."

First rail-lounger. "Lady Julia?"

Second rail-lounger nods.

Another rail-lounger. "A jolly girl that."

A murmur among the approximate rail-loungers.

First rail-lounger (turning heavily round).
"Where's he gone to?"

Second rail-lounger (in a growling tone of non-approval). "Oh! I don't know."

First rail-lounger. "I don't think much of him ——"

Nor did Rupert of himself — at least not in the sense meant by rail lounge No. 1. He walked across the park north-westwards, so little esteeming himself in reality, so little caring to do so in appearance, that nine people out of ten would have supposed him self-sufficient. He esteemed himself much too little for his present requirements — much less than *he* can afford whose higher safeguards are out of order.

"Lady Julia chaffing about it!" he said to himself aloud, as soon as a few rapid strides had placed the rail-loungers out of earshot. "Chaffing about it! Chaffing about *her* . . . It's a fit commentary on——"

"On what? on whom? and why is it fit?" whispered a stern and distinguishable voice within him.

But the voice, though stern and distinguishable, was lost in the drone of discordant vehemence. He hurried on north-westwards, hugging his bubble-grievance, and congratulating himself on the

tumour-like hardness of a diseased resolve —

To do what? He would have been much puzzled to answer that question definitely, as he strode onwards, haggard and unquiet, like the Wandering Jew. His resolution was only firm in its infirmity; a breath would have blown to annihilation the bubble-grievance.

Firm in his infirmity and grimly irresolute, he walked on till he came to the gates that lead into Kensington Gardens from the park. Entering the gardens, he took successively three or four directions, the last of which brought him nearly to Rotten Row some forty minutes after coming in at the gate. Here he turned, and again steered north-west, till he had passed out of Kensington Gardens, when he changed his course, and not long afterwards arrived among a labyrinth of walled lanes overhung with laburnum.

Another half-hour at least was employed

in identifying one lane and one villa where lanes and villas abounded without inter-variation. At length he stopped before the gate of one, made a careful comparative examination of the brick wall and laburnums, walked up the lane, came back again to the gate, and finally pulled the bell in a weak and ineffectual manner.

Which feeble summons meeting with no response from within, he rang again after an unreasonable interval, and shortly afterwards the door was opened with a jerk.

A fat, low-browed woman, with a snub-nose and a self-sufficient expression of countenance, stood before him, trembling with ill-suppressed anxiety to "tell him her mind," should circumstances give her the chance of doing so with the slightest colour of justice.

Rupert stood appalled. He would sooner have encountered a gorilla. He wavered, and showed some disposition to flee ignominiously.

"Well! young man!" said the stern portress; "What do you want?"

Rupert drew a long breath, and stammered out:

"Is Madame Gua ——"

"No Madams here," she answered in a sharp voice. "Go about your business, you impudent young scamp, or I'll call the p'leece."

Simultaneously with the last word the door was shut in his face—nearly precipitating him backwards into the lane by contact with the tip of his nose.

He stood in the middle of the lane, balanced on the sharp horns of a dilemma, with improbability before and ridicule behind; whereupon, being driven by a pair of round eyes that beamed interrogatively within the gateway of the opposite villa, he walked forwards, looking right and left as he went, till he came to one that accorded both in name and appearance with the address which was in his mind.

He stood before the bell, looked up and down the lane, saw other round eyes peeping from other gateways, and in fact, under compulsion of round eyes, real and imaginary, rang sharply.

The gate was opened with no less asperity by a dirty man-servant dressed in shabby black, who appeared with his mouth full of dinner and his mind full of surliness. His shirt was stained with blood from an old razor cut; his coat had lost a button; and he smelt of undigested onions.

The sun shone fiercely upon the interlocutors whilst the following words passed between them:—

Rupert. "Is Madame Gua——"

Servant. "Don't see no comp'ny."

Again his nose was in danger of being flattened by a closing door. He retired in astonishment too great for anger, and thus gravely mused as he walked down the lane:

"I suppose it's the habit of the middle

classes in England to slam the door in people's faces!"

This hypothesis, however, did not satisfy him. He hung about in the lane for a minute or two irresolutely; then turned back, walked up to the gate with a dogged countenance, and rang stoutly.

"Does Madame Guarini *live here?*" said he in a tone that nearly knocked backwards the man in shabby black.

"Well, sir," answered the dirty man; "she don't see visitors, not in general; but perhaps if you would give your name——"

"Ah! yes. . . . Give my name—Signor Molini," said Rupert, who was determined not to be checkmated now.

These words were distinctly whispered into his ear as by a prompter—he recognised them to be so; by whom?

And was there no other whisper, drowned by the pedal note that droned within him? Yes, as surely as he proved it by repeating in an impatient tone:

"Give *my name*—Signor Molini. You hear? Signor Molini."

The dirty man withdrew, and, presently returning, led the way into the room where Sir John Campion's momentous interview with Caterina had taken place six weeks before.

The room was empty of people, and full of dust—the latter having been blown over the wall from the lane by a strong summer breeze.

It was untidy, yet it had the appearance of being only half inhabited. Books and music were thrown in heaps on a sofa near the window, whilst the greater part of the furniture was disposed as if the house were to let. Some proof engravings of allied generals, Newfoundland dogs, and choristers hung from the walls in maple frames; whilst two or three clever sketches and a meritorious copy of the Fornarina lay flat on a large round table amongst uncut novels ranged equidistantly.

For a long five minutes Rupert was left alone to contemplate these things, and consider how far they agreed with his previous expectations in the matter; then the door opened—and so did his mind, as his *alias* and its responsibilities flashed across it.

As light to pictures, so are circumstances to people — making or marring their effect. The visitor and the visited did not appear to each other, when the door opened, as they had appeared before; the light fell differently upon them.

Was Rupert disenchanted? Not so; but rather he was puzzled, dazzled, disappointed, humiliated: he recognised something that had better not have been — and that something as depending much or wholly on himself; but he failed to recognise how it did so—he had better have recognised nothing. The blind man feels his way in safety, when the short-sighted man falls into the visible pit.

Did Caterina show herself to Rupert

more truthfully then, than before? Had she two distinct selves, warring within, and prevailing alternately? Was the perceptible variation owing to some defect not seen in other lights, or to the shadow of something else crossing it? Analogy favours this triple supposition well, and equally well its opposite. The present scene can do no more by itself, nor can any imaginable sequel. The rippling currents of countless streamlets are not to be recognised in the ocean, be the ocean smooth or stormy.

But shall we take the present scene, and join it, link by link, to the other component parts? I believe that I shall best consult the reader's wishes by letting the bare scene lead to its own explanation, if it will do so. Thus run the details:

When the door opened, and they stood opposite each other at less than two yards' distance, Rupert looked most embarrassed — Caterina most impressed, by their ac-

tual position. Caterina, though quite unprepared for such a visit, seemed to know more about it than he did; she seemed to repel without producing the effect of repulsion. No more was said than what follows:

Rupert. "I . . . Perhaps I ought not to have come. In fact, after what you said ——"

Caterina. "It was *very* kind of you. It was . . . like yourself. I cannot find words to express myself; nor ought I to do so truthfully. How can I be so ungrateful as to say, 'Go from here, and be less . . . be different from what you are elsewhere . . . to me. Do not show yourself truthfully as you are—as all that . . . all others who have crossed my path are not.' How can I say this to you? I can not; but you must . . . must take it as said; you . . . you ought to go—I tell you so."

Rupert. "I came—not confident, or even sanguine, yet not prepared for the

annihilation of as much hope as is born twinly with strong feeling."

Caterina. "Go.—I entreat you—go! I will not let you entail upon yourself future regret. Will you force me to protract that refusal? Will you force me to be my own exec—? Go. I implore you to go!"

Rupert. "If you have found me as you say—all that others are not to you, and if it costs you something to say that I must leave you—why hug a resolution to which nothing compels you?"

Caterina. "It is not sufficient that I have found you what others are not——"

Rupert. "But if I have found you what others are not—what I supposed one at least to ——"

He broke off suddenly, having reached the same point that he could not weather on a former occasion. Now, as then, the magnitude of the purposed lie fairly blew him back. A short but troublous pause was broken as follows:

Rupert. "If I have found that—if I have found something more?"

Caterina. "Still, I say—go! I ought not to have listened to so much."

Rupert. "You told me yesterday, when speaking of Lady Ravensdale, that if husbands were like me, the lives of women would be happier."

Caterina. "I did."

Rupert. "And you told me, just now, that you had found me all that others had not been to you."

Caterina. "I did. But it must not be. You know not the power of the world's sneers. Do not force me to let you encounter them."

Rupert. "My name and the protecting power I ask you to give me shall ——"
(Enter the dirty man-servant, *loq.*):—

"Mr. Molini, mum. Are you at home? He's at the front door. (Aside) They all calls themselves Molini this morning."

Caterina. "I am going to sit to him,

and I cannot bear to be stared at in his studio."

Rupert (in a low voice). "And — and — ?"

Dirty man-servant. "What am I to tell him, mum? Which he's a-waiting."

Caterina. "Show him into the dining-room." *Exit* dirty man-servant. (Half-aside) "It's a dream — the most beautiful of dreams. . . . But —"

Rupert. "But . . . will you be my wife?"

Caterina (still half aside). "If I could only realise it — let my eyes and mind dwell upon the written words!"

Rupert. "Before two hours —"

(Re-enter dirty man-servant, *log.*) :

"Please, mum, he's in the dining-room."

So ended the conference. Rupert left the house, and walked rapidly down the lane. Caterina remained standing; and the dirty man-servant announced Mr. Molini No. 2, who appeared under the form and features of —

Lord Ravensdale.

This conference was short, very expressive of something, but very inexpressive of what that something was. They confronted each other silently for several seconds; Caterina wrapped in the solitary self-containment of womanly scorn; Lord Ravensdale supplying himself with a sort of Dutch courage by the dram-drinking, offensive, and case-hardening power which is to be found by diving deep into the lowest wallowing pits of a low nature. They spoke thus:—

Caterina (in a low concentrated voice).
“Again?”

Lord Ravensdale (looking dogged, but avoiding her eye). “What’s the use of going on like that, when I’m doing all I can to make up for what’s past?”

Caterina (half-aside). “Now that you are tired of *her*, and . . .” (her voice softening, and her features stiffening into a heart-weary smile) “I am not reproaching you; I

could not if I would. But in four such years as I have passed since the 12th of October, 18—, the mind becomes incredulous of happiness, and confidence rusts from want of use."

Lord Ravensdale. "Have you forgotten other days — before then?"

Caterina. "Forgotten! Is it for *you* to ask me such a question? Am I risking the only chance of respectability that I have ever had, to be asked this?"

Lord Ravensdale. "And what am I not risking? If I am seen here just now, and known to have been here, as I *have* been, five times in the last fortnight, what chance have I of gaining what is most important to us both?"

Caterina. "I risk the loss of all that remains to a woman circumstanced as myself. I risk the . . . (in a tone of bitter mirth) the *réchauffé* of a reputation. I act with foul ingratitude to the man who has twice befriended me at my utmost need,

and who finally comes forward spontaneously to sacrifice his future prospects, and encounter the ridicule of the world in which he has been so eminently successful, by an act of reparation — and of what kind? Reparation of a wrong that none know of, or would care about if they did know of it; reparation of another's wrong; reparation, therefore, of that kind which renders a man ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of his fellows — pitiable even to his own sisters."

Lord Ravensdale. "If you would be but half as forgiving to me as to Champion ——"

Caterina (in a tone rather too affirmative for the setting forth of steady conviction). "I have nothing to forgive him."

Lord Ravensdale. "Not for having taken the greatest pains and trouble to persuade me to go where he knew Miss Grahame was, and Ernsford was not? Not for that

—and a lot more traps that he laid, to get hold of you at the cost of any amount of misery to any one except himself? He used every possible argument to get me to Carlsbad, just when I was in a frightful money difficulty that was not my own fault, but which involved my honour. He carried my cursed letter to you—instead of putting it in the post, as I asked him to do. He then waited about in the lane, that he might seem to befriend you at a critical moment when you supposed yourself deserted; he then took you to Lady Goodwin's, where he knew you could not possibly remain; and then . . . There is nothing to forgive in following out *such* an object without any conscience, or caring for the ruin he brought on us all?"

Caterina. "Deception from those we do not love——"

Lord Ravensdale. "He was an old friend of mine too, and got a chance of doing all this by being so. I don't want to be too

hard upon him — I suppose there's no saying what a man won't do in that way; but still he did bring it all upon you, and he moved heaven and earth to do it."

Caterina. "And after all that I once was to you, can you calmly dwell upon this?"

Lord Ravensdale. "Calmly? If I were calm about it, should I try to bring a public scandal on my house, as I am now trying to do, for your sake—for *our* sakes? Caterina! why will you be so hard upon me?"

Caterina (aside, in a voice little more than just audible). "Not upon *you* — upon *myself* for you. I will not sacrifice you; but" (turning away) "my own heart can never change."

Lord Ravensdale. "When if you wish to make me happy, you will assist me to ensure your own."

Caterina. "How?"

Lord Ravensdale. "As I told you the last time we met, and the time before."

Caterina. "I have been thinking of it night and day; I have thought of nothing else; but ——"

Lord Ravensdale. "Yet you entertain the alternative; you would marry Cam-pion, whom you could never bear; you would accept him, hard up as he is, and marrying you as a duty — a sort of pill to put his conscience in order; you would accept him rather than ——" (he pauses, and for the first time during the interview, raises his eyes to hers) "rather than me. I ought to have understood what you meant by the way you received me when I came into the room."

He turned as if to go away.

Caterina. "You have less right to say so than any man in the world. You — you know better: you know how I . . ."

Lord Ravensdale (turning back). "I *did* think so. But what can I think now, when

you won't make an effort for me? What am I to think, when I see you ready to sacrifice *me* rather than *her* — your rival, who moved heaven and earth to get me away from you, and ——”

Caterina. “Don't I tell you what you already know too well — the fatal influence you hold over me? You know too well what I would sacrifice for you; you know what I *have* sacrificed.”

Lord Ravensdale. “I didn't mean what I said; it was jealousy that made me say so; I'm very sorry. . . . But is there nothing to be done?”

Caterina. “How? you have talked in this way the last ten times I have seen you, but you will not explain.”

Lord Ravensdale. “Well, I think you know, you might . . . that is, if . . . The fact is — when one's driven into a corner . . . in short, women have such resources — and no one is so clever as you are; and a — it might be done, you know,

and no harm to any one, for it *must* come to that sooner or later; and it would be the saving of me; and I've never¹ been happy since I went to Carlsbad instead of marrying you, as I was going to have done, if it hadn't been for her, and — You know the present Lord Elfintower?"

Caterina (averting her face rather abruptly). "Yes; I met him at Molini's studio."

Lord Ravensdale (standing on either leg alternately, and making ungraceful genuflexions). "A . . . you see I don't know that it sounds very well, though I'm sure I'd be glad of anything that would make me free, a — of course I mean for *you*. . . . Well, then — the fact is, he's seen about with her so much that people talk about it — they do, indeed, very much, in fact" (in a low voice, after a pause) "if I can get a divorce, *we* can be married abroad; and no one will know anything further. None of the Perringtons will remember you; you're

so altered since then — in fact, grown so much handsomer. I can so manage it that you will be received without a question being raised . . . a son can pass for a nephew, and inherit all the unentailed property . . . a future son can inherit what is entailed. . . . Will you forget the past, which has been as hard for me as for you, and be happy with me ?”

Caterina (changing colour and involuntarily putting her hand in his). “Tell me — what ? Time presses : I cannot see you longer to-day, as you know.”

Lord Ravensdale. “You know him ; you meet him ; you can meet him oftener, if you choose ; you can (what-do-you-call it) sympathise with him ; give a sentimental description of her ; excite his chivalrous feelings and all that sort of thing (a — a — I don’t mean to laugh at that sort of thing, of course, you *know* that) ; encourage him, in short, don’t you know — *Caterina* ! you must choose between me and

your rival. Will you be my wife, or will you force her upon me anew?"

Caterina. "Yes! no! go! no — stay! come to-morrow morning."

Lord Ravensdale. "I will . . . at the same hour." *Exit.*

Caterina (thinking half aloud). "Cleverness then in a woman means deception! Is that the experience he gained in the three years of my devotion to him? How morbid I am . . . How could he express himself differently? . . . Strange — very strange; everything is strange. Shall I try to reflect, or shall I trust myself wholly to — to what? To what am I trusting myself? An unpractical question now, if the answer be unsatisfactory. Everything is strange. The very proposal that he made to me just now — the idea he asked me to carry out — has been lying still and unrecognised in my own mind. And what is the idea? Rather, let me ask myself, what is the *whole* of mine?"

Enter dirty man-servant. *Loq.* "Please, mum, there's another Mr. Molini at the door."

Caterina colours angrily at the dirty man-servant's awkward statement of facts. *Enter* the real Mr. Molini, easel in hand, and *exit* the *narrative* in the direction of Lord Ravensdale's house, where some morning music is going on, and half a dozen transplanted rail-loungers, on good terms with each other, and on still better terms with themselves, are showing their appreciation of "Mira la bianca luna," by standing with hands impocketed on the staircase, and carrying on the following conversation in a low, thick buzz :

First rail-lounger. "I don't believe he's engaged to her."

Second ditto. "Why not?"

Third ditto. "Who?"

First ditto. "Sevenoaks."

Fourth ditto. "Who to?"

Fifth ditto. "To Miss Grahame."

Sixth ditto. "What was all that about her and Lord Elfintower — I mean the one that died?"

Second ditto. "Why, she made up to him as hard as she could, to be sure, and that was why her sister's engagement with him was broken off. Why, she went after him — rode over to Ernsford early in the morning and late at night, and ——"

First ditto (sententiously). "No; there'd have been a row about it."

Second ditto (as from authority). "It was hushed up, of course."

Minority of half-incredulous ditto. "Eugh . . . oogh."

Fifth ditto (who prides himself on the fashionable art of making truth and "the other thing" indistinguishable in social converse). "They say she" (meaning Lady Ravensdale) goes down to Cremorne in a Hansom."

First ditto. "Devilish jolly of her."

Third ditto (who contemplates matrimony

or himself). "Ogh . . . You shouldn't say such things as that ——"

Fifth ditto. "Upon my soul I was told so."

This pleasant account of English morality among the upper classes a literary foreigner is all the while transferring to his own memory, with the attention and respect to which, as spontaneously deposed by a countryman of the two ladies mentioned, it is so justly entitled. No doubt he will ere long publish a thrilling work on the subject, showing how the evil might easily be remedied by a judicious combination of universal suffrage and a central power that renders all suffrage ridiculous.

Two hours pass. The crowd is gone. Turn we to Notting-hill, where we left Caterina rather more abruptly than suits the narrative.

Some one opens the door; it is not the dirty man-servant about to announce another Mr. Molini: it is Sir John Campion.

They speak as follows, looking the while as if they saw something besides themselves, though in truth there is no one there, either in body or in semblance, to interrupt their duality.

Caterina (rising in dignified confusion). "I had no idea you meant to return to-day."

Sir John. "I am *thoroughly* aware of it."

Caterina (colouring). "What do you mean to express by that?"

Sir John. "That which was sufficiently clear when I entered the room, but which your question has rendered even more so."

Caterina (striving to suppose herself aggrieved by him). "Is this the way in which you intend to compound for your generosity?"

Sir John. "What way?"

Caterina. "What you said just now. You know very well ——"

Sir John. "You are angry because I believed what you said."

Caterina. "You implied — you insinuated ——"

Sir John. "The truth. Let us be open with each other : we shall both have a better chance by being so."

Caterina abstracts from the expression of her countenance all recognition of Sir John's presence, and transfers the same to the tone of her voice in an uneasy laugh. She commences an encounter of silence, but abandons that weapon quickly, and the conference thus proceeds :

Caterina. "You repent of of what you said last month. You . . . you — want to make me refuse . . . break it off ——"

Sir John. "I would do almost anything rather than recriminate, but you absolutely force me to do so. The truth is this — *you* repent of having accepted my

offer a month ago: *you* want to make *me* break it off, because ——”

Caterina. “It’s all untr——”

Sir John. “You cannot finish the word; your instincts are truer than your mind, as it now is.”

Caterina. “Do as you will. I will hear no more.” (Moves towards the door.)

Sir John (placing himself, as if accidentally, before the door). “Kindly stay here two or three minutes more! I will not detain you long; but what I have to say is of the utmost importance to us both, because the subject concerns us more than any other subject, and because your decision upon it must now be final.”

Caterina (falling back on one side of the door). “What decision do you mean? I have said nothing different from what I said a month ago. I say again that you are very generous — very generous. I . . . I am *very* tired, after sitting to Molini for two hours in a *very* fatiguing attitude. I

am really not equal to this sort of thing to-day."

Sir John. "Pardon me for detaining you a few minutes longer; but I cannot help thinking it better that you should at once be in a position to set the question at rest by getting rid either of me or the conviction which is uppermost in my mind. My conviction is, that the note which you gathered up in such a hurry when I came unexpectedly into the room just now, was from Lord Ravensdale. Don't violate your better instincts by denying what I do not *suspect*, but *know* — I *saw* the handwriting accidentally."

Caterina. "Then why, if you ——"

Sir John. "Listen but a few seconds more! You are playing some double or treble game — I cannot say what — but I know you are deceiving me — now when I least deserve to be deceived by you."

Caterina. "You have no right to suspect ——"

Sir John. "Not when you receive two visitors under feigned names?"

Caterina. "It's unmanly — outrageous of you to talk in this manner. Say and do what you will — oppress the defenceless ——"

Sir John. "I don't think that is quite what I have done to you, or what I was going to do."

Caterina. "Then why say such wicked things of me as that?"

Sir John (with a curious expression of countenance). "Well, really, I beg your pardon. But you can no more suppose that I was in earnest than I can suppose that new servant to have been so just now, when he let me in, and said such odd things. It was all his fault. I suppose he's mad. I had better get rid of him. The fact is, he doesn't know me by sight, because I've been away ever since he came; so when he let me in just now, he stared and grinned at me a good deal, and said, 'Are you

another Mr. Molini?' I asked him why he supposed that I was? He hesitated for a moment or two, and said, 'Why, there's three of 'em been here to-day.'"

Caterina (again moving towards the door). "If it's come to this, that you are to turn me into ridicule, and before the servants——"

Sir John (with sudden and excessive seriousness of manner). "Ridicule! I should be as insane to do it, as you to suppose it of me. Apart from all better feeling, I ask you, 'Which of us is in a ridiculous position, as the world goes—you or I?' Is it likely that I should blazon it?"

Caterina. "And which of us is in a position of scorn — which of us is exposed to the world's contempt? Is it you or I?"

Sir John. "*You*, through the man with whom you have been corresponding secretly whilst I was making arrangements to take you effectually out of it."

Caterina. "And who helped and persuaded him to abandon me?"

Sir John. "You mean *me*. I neither helped nor persuaded him; but I said and did enough to make me feel responsible for it. I admired you very much, and examined myself very little, or rather not at all; therefore no doubt, my strong inclinations *did* colour what I said to him, and *did* influence him in some measure. And that is why I consent to stand here at this moment in a very humiliating and contemptible position, trying, for the last time, to save you from the consequences of your own wrongheadedness. Have you not experienced Lord Ravensdale's deception of you before? It is not in his power to do otherwise now; nor would he, if it were."

Caterina. "If he spoke of you as you speak of him! He meant no harm. If I had cared to keep his visit secret, I might have met him elsewhere. I had no idea that you would object to it till you accused

me of having deceived you. He only came to ask me not to think that he was what he had seemed to be—that he had been, in fact, overpersuaded, (he never said a word about *you*, or any one)—overpersuaded at a moment of great difficulty. I know that what he said was true, because he was going to have married me. I am very sorry to have offended you—very, very sorry. I will admit no more visitors.”
Exit. Manet Sir John.

Sir John (thinking). “What the devil am I to do? Ridicule pulls me one way, pity drags me the other, and conscience will not speak out. I must decide in a few days one way or the other. I can’t spy, but I’ll watch. Strange that such a really fine nature should have fallen in love with such a trumpery ass as Ravensdale—stranger still, if true, that she should remain constant to him under all circumstances! Titania and Bottom. . . . Titania and Bottom. . . . Titania and Bottom. . . .

A beautiful woman attracted by deception and an ass's head. It's an ill wind for me, whichever way it blows now. In the one case, I shall have to lose my own position — be sneered at by, perhaps, the largest acquaintance that any man in London has — make an immense sacrifice under the imputation of selfish, grovelling caprice — shelve myself utterly, for a woman who not only never cared for me, but has a rankling grievance against me — suffer for marrying her, and yet have it on my conscience that I helped to deteriorate her — in fact, incur all the failures belonging to both courses. In the other case, I shall load my conscience with a perspective responsibility and a probability of remorse such as I will not encounter if I can help it. It serves me right. Why did I get into it? It was nobody's fault but my own."

He walked gloomily out of the house, opened the garden gate, and turned towards

London. About a hundred yards down the lane, at the angle of a wall, he met Rupert on horseback. Their greeting was as follows:

Rupert. "Oh——"

Sir John. "Well?"

Rupert. "I didn't know you were in town."

Sir John. "It's my belief that you're going to the devil."

Rupert did not wait for the end of this declaration, but cantered on.

Sir John continued:

"Hallo, there! stop. I've been looking for you this year and a half, and more. I've something important to tell you."

The clatter of the horse's hoofs, and the tumult in Rupert's mind, prevented his words from being heard.

Sir John, with his mind wrapped in gloomy thoughts, pursued his way down the lane: Caterina, with her face wrapped in two thick veils, issued from the gar-

den gate, tightly holding a note in her hand.

When cause of suspicion is excessive, discrimination is apt to lose its way: *e. g.* Sir John Campion's mind ran the gauntlet of almost every probability incident to the question uppermost in it, except the two that jostled his observation as he walked down the lane. He very frankly recorded his opinion that Rupert was going to the devil; but he did so because the ideal concussion of Rupert's rejected chances with his own fate in perspective shook toleration to its centre—not because he had any suspicion that the former was about to consign a note into the hands of the dirty man-servant at Pyrocanthus Villa—not because he had any suspicion that the closely-veiled female figure which passed him in deepest mourning, was Caterina herself. He supposed all occurrences except the two that really occurred before his own eyes. He did, in fact, what we all do

in our careful inefficiency ; he omitted that which, if done, would by no means have led information in the way of truth.

* * * * *

Several hours roll by. Edith is alone in her dressing-room, clutching an open note between her fingers that will not clasp it ; and while tears roll down her cheeks with slow continuance, as if from a spring that had grown inexhaustible, her thoughts, now half uttered, now unspoken, wander on thus, or similarly :

“Misery . . . greater than I could have realised, even when I left the gallery for the last time. . . . Misery more horrible than when I crawled from the copse the next morning. THEN I looked into my own heart with horror : NOW I look away from it in terror. Past and present, right and wrong, constancy and crime, all seem alike in the confusion that hangs about me.

If I could but dissipate this confusion—this oppressive darkness.”

The door trembles on its hinges for an instant, as though held by a much restrained nervous power. Edith starts at the sight of a shadow in the doorway; yet the shadow is the shadow of her sister dressed for a ball.

Sound there is none—nor breath nor pulsation ripples the atmosphere in that room. An instant or two of time thus passes lengthily; and Constance closes the door noiselessly behind her.

The sisters are strangely confronted: the difference in moral power is greater between them now than ever; yet the influence of the stronger over the weaker is practically less. This thing is perceptible.

Constance pauses but a second, then walks up to the table at which her sister is sitting, and placing one hand firmly on the open note, without looking at it, says:

“Edith, you must destroy that note

Don't force me to say more about it. Don't—for God's sake, don't! I saw it; the post-man came to the door as I came in. I saw the handwriting: I waited in the drawing-room, that you might have read it before I saw you. I see your countenance now. I know . . . I . . . ask me no more about it; it is partly a mystery to me; and that which is *not* mystery I dare not think of. Ask me nothing, but destroy that note now, at once, without a moment's delay, before you can again acknowledge to your own mind that you have received it. Tear the note in pieces now, yourself—I cannot touch it. Hold it to this candle till every atom is consumed. Put out the remembrance of it—as what it is—a hideous dream—a thing that has not been at all in reality.”

Her voice is not very unsteady; its tone is not remarkable in itself, nor by comparison with that of other people, but only for being different to any sound that ever

before issued from her lips. Her manner is too intense to be agitated, though her words might, perhaps, indicate agitation.

Edith feels her position without comprehending it. Constance feels, comprehends, acts, yet shrinks shuddering from the recognition of the actuality before her. The component parts that characterise the scene bear to each other a relation more potential than actual: harmony floats over chaos.

Why is the influence of the stronger over the weaker paradoxically lessened in an inverse ratio with the moral power of the two?

It is that the strength of the stronger is otherwise oppressed: it is that Constance is feeling, thinking, acting and speaking dually, as a sister and as a woman—as a sister who protects, and as a woman who loves: it is that the note which Edith clutches is in Rupert's handwriting, and a horrible suspicion, such as takes the form

of a horrible certainty without giving its morbid repose, circulates poison-like through Constance's mind, paralysing two-thirds of its available resources: it is that, thus paralysed, her mind can do no more than determine to carry out its own immediate object: it is, that even the most unselfish entrance of self into a question, fictitiously raises the protected by depression of the protector: it is, that moral command and heart-rivalry cannot co-exist.

The component parts that characterise the scene are these:—Insufficiency, shaking but not inclining the balance; power, incidentally weakened, making satire grin with overloaded satisfaction; pathos, ever dominant when it can claim entrance, making sublimity cover a larger space than it is here entitled to.

A few seconds pass in dead silence; then Constance lays her hand on the note yet more firmly than before, and says in a tone not louder but stronger:

“Put out the remembrance of it as it is—I mean as it seems; for so it *is* not, in reality, but only a lying resemblance tempting you to perdition—you and him. . . . Him—whoever it may be—him, I say,—you, him, us, all to—to—what God, in His mercy, only knows—only can save us from.”

Edith shudders, and buries her face in the thick folds of her hair, as they fall in a wave of gold over the dressing-table. She answers nothing, though the question is enforced by a searching silence; but she rises from the table, and hastily unlocks an *escritoire*. Constance watches her and the *escritoire* with attention so strained, so separable from the visible object, that the fact itself becomes an abstraction in her mind. She stands rooted to the spot—her limbs rigid, her breathing well nigh suspended, her eyes dilated and fixed like one in a fit of catalepsy.

The lock turns; the drawer slides open without sound—almost without visible

motion; the little escritoire is all but hidden under a mass of golden hair. Constance starts from her rigid attitude into something more than vital energy; she has seized the note from Edith's hand—she crosses the room—or rather is seen to have passed to the other end of it: all is done—nothing doing before the sight, at that end of the room. She is not seen to take it; but some ashes and a broken candle, torn from the candlestick, are lying in the grate.

All is silent—repletely silent in that room; stillness reigns in horrible, death-like supremacy, pregnant of woe unlimited and obscure. Edith remains transfixed at the escritoire, her long hair falling in a golden wave of many hues over the drawer, her fingers half opened, yet in attitude of clutching.

Constance stands by the fireplace, where the candle yet burns amid charred paper and liquid wax; her fingers are blackened and slightly burnt; her wreath has fallen

off, and now burns unnoticed in the grate ; her cheeks are absolutely devoid of colour ; her eyes are fixed without seeing. It can scarcely be perceived that she breathes ; her whole countenance denotes self-suppression strained to its extremest limit at the call of extremest requirement.

But silence such as this rapidly exhausts the power to maintain it ; and the comparative pressure on that power cannot be estimated.

Constance is the first to record the stillness by an uttered sound. She crosses the room, stands close to her sister without touching her, and says in a low tone, evenly syllabled :

“Edith! you must annihilate the remembrance of this as I have annihilated that note. You are encompassed by a horrible delusion: push it from you — or you are lost: push it from you — a worse evil than you ever yet encountered, *even dimly in a dream*, will overwhelm you

before you can again stop to *think*. Edith! my mother is waiting for me in the carriage, and will break in upon this dreadful meeting, if I stay longer, for she told me to come and say that perhaps we leave town to-morrow. . . . Edith! you must help yourself—or fall into the awful abyss over which you are hanging. Edith! *I* can do no more: I leave you—mistress of your own fate and that of—others.”

Constance goes home, puts on another wreath, and goes to the ball. She is not much paler than usually of late—not much more silent: her complexion has become deadly, invariable—incapable of changing or acquiring colour: her voice has no inflexions: feeling seems to have grown lethargic in her from exhaustion, if its manifestation be not violently suppressed for a purpose. She remains half an hour only, and goes home without question or hindrance.

Midnight has struck. Edith's carriage has waited and been dismissed, as also her

maid. Edith herself has crept to a sofa, and from stupefaction passed into sleep, such as does not repose, but exhausts.

Images overcrowd that heavy slumber—semblances of places, people and words—semblances that give pain and weariness like reality, yet merge obscurely into each other.

She is standing in the old gallery at Ernsford—or rather she *sees herself* there, and her heart seems to beat where she sees herself: it is as though a scene of her life were unfolding to sentient self-observance. The old gallery floats in black, empty space, dimly unmistakeable; and so float similarly unfolding scenes past at Carlsbad—the crisis in the ball-room, the meeting outside, the dream and awakening, the cross roads—the last interview. So float similarly all other scenes that make up the story of her life—the return from church on her wedding-day, the opera-box, with all it contained within and showed without, during the last two

years. In all these scenes there are but two actors—herself and Edgar; regarding whom all facts are shown as they occurred, except his death: this seems obscurely imminent, but not accomplished, nor even real in its obscure imminence. Edgar and herself pass in exclusive duality through all these scenes—even to the last at the opera—even to the last in that room, before Constance placed her hand upon the open note.

And in the transitions of these shifting scenes there is this difference between the two actors—her own semblance is invariable; but, in respect of his, craving unduly preponderates over recognition. Craving and woe grow as the unmeasured fancy-time passes.

Faster locked in that exhaustive sleep, her dream-sensations grow stronger as midnight melts into early dawn; but the images that crowd increasingly into that indefinite space, where her soul wanders

sorrowing and craving, grow more and more involved; so that to separate and understand them seems impossible — or rather possible, to her dream-conscience, but beyond her present dream-power of exertion.

Faster locked in that exhausting sleep, her dream-mind wanders into the time that encompasses her present waking life, and now definite confusion grows out of indistinguishable chaos.

The old gallery at Ernsford floats before her; its walls surround her; yet she is not in it; she sees herself in it — herself and Edgar, as on the day when they plighted their troth. And the walls grow dim, and one side looks like the side of her opera-box; and the brothers stand before her, indistinguishably alike, yet neither exactly resembling what either has been; and the open note lies before her — now as if on the writing-table near the east window at Ernsford, now as if on the cushion of the opera-

box. The scene grows darker; the two brothers grow from resemblance into unity; there is but one standing before her. Shivering with indistinguishable fear and ecstasy, she springs forward in a delirium of passion, and clasps—black empty space: thick darkness closes round her. She starts into a rigid attitude of waking terror—yet not waking; she is only on the borderland of waking life; she sinks back stark, and weary, to sleep that will never repose her.

Dawn expands into early morning. The greyish white veil of luminous mist changes from pink to deeper and deeper rose. One candle flickers in the socket of the candlestick; the remains of the other encrust the grate with wax.

Edith still sleeps her exhausting sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAWN had scarcely melted into early morning when Rupert started from a sleep as exhausting as Edith's. He rose stark and weary; his eyes looked strained and lustreless; his limbs moved unreadily and without vital spring; he looked altogether unvigorous, unlike himself, incongruous with the fresh strong summer's morning.

He rose with a chill at the heart. Retrospection and anticipation sat alike uneasily on his conscience, and the present time seemed unavailable. Indefinite uneasiness became definite anxiety, as he thought and remembered.

But anxiety and weariness cannot reign together: one or other must prevail beyond question of its supremacy; and weariness

will not be that one, if mind, nerve, blood and muscle combine with fresh excitement against it. It was not weariness that oppressed him after he had risen: it was a fever of the mind.

So passed the hours from five o'clock in the morning till eleven, when he went out. How he employed, or rather got through, those hours, none can tell — not even himself. When the overcrowded brain has no place for reflection, and suffering has no alternative, time passes obscurely and without measurement.

He left the house at eleven o'clock, and walked rapidly towards the park, shutting his ears against the self-confessions that issued spontaneously and irrepressibly from within. There is in the unguarded avenues of everyone's conscience a counterfeit; and that counterfeit said to Rupert in plausible words what may be plainly rendered thus: "You have placed yourself in such a position that you *must* wrong one of two

women, therefore you ought to wrong that one to whom you are most bound by every reason properly most binding to you." So counselled the false oracle; and the false was, as ever, more loud-tongued than the true. Yet the true was very persistent as Rupert approached Kensington Gardens, where he soon after found Caterina at or near the spot where he had met her a dozen times during the past six weeks.

She looked extraordinarily handsome, attractive and attractible. The flush of expectancy, rising soft and warm on her cheeks, greeted his approach. Her voice was emotional, but not sad. Her manner was such as indefinitely acknowledged and recorded that their inter-relation was different to what it had been before. Rupert looked pale, nervous and doubtful, yet resolved; resolution was supported by the united force of good and evil.

He took a note from his pocket, and held it with appearance of concealment in his

hand. He looked ill, anxious and determined, yet neither dignity nor pathos could be truly affirmed of him as he stood there. He said nothing, but seemed as if waiting for events to propel him. He seemed prepared to hold his way, but not to take the initiative.

Caterina met the requirement of the case with a quickness that bordered on anticipation. She slightly averted her face, and said in a low, intense voice:

"I am here because . . . I could not help it, after . . . *yesterday*. I could not trust my own memory. I could not believe it possible."

A strange sort of thrill, strangely akin to a shudder, passed through Rupert's nerves as he took her hand. He, too, averted his face, but the expression on it was wavering self-contention. He paused, hesitated, and said:

"I scarcely know—scarcely understand what . . . in these last few days since . . . I . . . you . . . since I——"

"I cannot remain a moment," interrupted Caterina, drawing her veil hurriedly over her face. "I—I am watched. For *your* sake I must go. I—I received your *first* note—I mean your note—yesterday. I am watched. You *must* not come again to the house. For *your* sake: I care not for slander on my *own* account——"

She drew her veil more closely over her face, and held out her hand tremulously. Rupert extended his—and the note that was in it.

She tore open the envelope as she walked rapidly away. Rupert stood for a few moments motionless; his eyes were fixed upon her retreating figure apparently without seeing it. Suddenly he ran forward, and said as he reached her:

"Then is it to . . . to be . . . so . . . as in the note?"

Caterina neither stopped nor turned her head; but she held out her hand to his,


pressed it very slightly, and, instantly drawing back her own, answered :

“ Yes — I will.”

Rupert remained standing on that same spot of ground for a longer period than the reader would care to believe on a bare statement. Caterina continued walking with undiminished speed till she reached Pyrocanthus Villa.

She shut the drawing-room door with a degree of carefulness such as drawing-room doors are not accustomed to under ordinary circumstances, then drew down the blinds of both the windows, walked to the writing-table, and sat down before it in a listening attitude.

A flush of twofold interpretation came quick and hot into her cheeks ; her brow contracted ; her hand shook, but under control ; then, ere many seconds were over, a gesture of impatience, half forced, half real, indicated that misgivings were in her mind, with power to annoy, if not to influence it.



Twice and distinctly she made that gesture; then took an envelope, and directed it with extraordinary attention.

Some twenty envelopes she had directed thus, when, choosing one of them, she drew from her pocket the note that Rupert had just given her, took it out of its own envelope, put it into the one she had selected, and sealed it with a blank seal.

Putting the sealed note carefully into her pocket, she took the other directed envelopes, and lighting a candle, held them to the flame till they were consumed; throwing the ashes into a newspaper, and thence into the grate.

She then put her hand experimentally into the pocket where the sealed note was, and drawing up all the window-blinds in quick succession, took the shortest way to the garden gate, and walked, closely veiled, down the lane.

Meanwhile Rupert had left Kensington Gardens, and was crossing the park, medi-

tating how to get rid of the two following importunate annoyances — First, a space of time during which he must await the accomplishment of such evil as he was hugging grimly and calling inevitable: Secondly, a space of ground over which he must pass before he should be able to await the above-mentioned accomplishment in a state of pseudo peace.

He thought of these annoyances, which, he felt to be something more — something from the recognition of which he sought present escape in rapid walking. He took the most direct line to Hyde Park Corner, crossing the road at its most central and therefore widest part. He reached the archway without seeing anyone, for his mind was strongly bent on not seeing; but something stronger than the obstinacy of a mind ashamed of itself forced his eyes to see ere he reached home.

At the corner of Dover Street two or three riders passed before him over the crossing: he looked up, distinctly against his

own will, and saw Constance. He started, and changed colour so visibly as to attract the observation of more than one passer-by.

"Too late — God help me!" he thought as he turned away. "Too late! I must go on — or commit a twofold crime. Why in the name of wilful blindness did I never use my opportunities before? Horrible — most horrible retribution. I must go on — on — on — at something — no matter what. I feel as if, for the remainder of my life, I must be like the Wandering Jew — living in eternal unrest. On — on — on! One moment's rest — one moment's pause — one moment's reflection, will make endurance impossible.

Rupert passed on: Constance passed on: their ways were different: the space between them was rapidly widening: but in that second of time, when each was seen by the other unprepared and without disguise, the doubts of two years had vanished and left no trace of their existence.

Those who do not think, but rather select opinions from a mass of conjectures — who do not feel, but rather pass over the surface of many experiences, will be apt to denounce this mutual perception as unreal and spasmodic; but analogy will not support their objection; analogy will show that such recognitions are generally instantaneous, and often in their nature contrary to expectation. Analogy will show more: it will show that women far less capable than Constance can see, as she did then, confirmation of that which no one else would have suspected, in a momentary and indescribable something which no one else would have seen.

Rupert passed on: Constance passed on: Rupert to await responsibly — Constance to await irresponsibly. But how much of the truth had Constance discovered or imagined? Will analogy support the belief that her knowledge or her suppositions were complete? I trow it will not.

CHAPTER IX.

THE sun had set, and the carriage-lamps might be seen flitting among the trees in the park. A single brougham and pair of post horses waited in Park Lane, or went up and down at a foot's pace, between the Marble Arch and Grosvenor Gate. A lady impenetrably veiled, and covered almost down to her feet by a loose grey mantle, passed the carriage slowly on the side next the railings, as it stood still on the north side of Grosvenor Gate. She passed twice, and paused; then moved forward two or three steps, and leaned against the railings for support that was visibly needed. Almost at the same instant Rupert, pale as a corpse lying under a ray of moonlight, sprang out of the carriage, and handed her in.

The carriage drove off on its way to a suburban parish : he had reached the point to which he had been advancing for the last month with obstinacy more and more unwilling. He was face to face with his actual position. And what was it ? Rather — what did it then seem to him ? It seemed to him in these words, unspoken, but rapidly, thought without recognition in form of words :

“ Solemnly ridiculous : seriously contemptible. It seems, and *will* seem so : and to *seem* is to *be*, so far as regards a man’s reputation — that air-bubble of many breaths which, when multiplied, influences millions. But what are the feather-weights, ridicule and contempt, poised in the scale with all I have to bear and to answer for ? On — on — on ! Unrest is what I have lived on since . . . ”

The epitome of some such words as these flashed across him as he stepped into the carriage and shut the door ; but before they

had gone many yards, he was otherwise absorbed.

But how! Shall we attempt to separate and compare the mass of feelings that crowded conflictly in his heart and mind? Not so. The effect of crowding and jostling is ever to confuse one with another, and to equalise for the time being. Remorse, self-hatred, hopeless longing, pity, chivalry, instinct of protection — were imaged confusedly in the delirium of his mind-fever, which was raging higher and higher.

Meanwhile the brougham rolled on at a pace that brought them into the Regent's Park in less than ten minutes. The post-boy had not been told to drive at an unusual rate: he seemed to take the order for granted, and obey it with malicious pleasure. All this time — so short, in fact—so long, in seeming—Rupert had neither moved nor spoken: he had fixed his eyes without seeing. They passed out of the Regent's Park, but no word had yet been said, no ges-

ture made, to show that he himself was the chief actor in that terribly real drama. Still going at the same speed, they reached the detached villas and market gardens of suburban London. The houses began to be fewer and interspersed with hedgerows: they had now come several miles without exchanging a word or a look.

And ever since he entered the carriage at Grosvenor Gate, he had been struggling with himself to break that horrid spell; and ever since, the suspense had grown more and more intolerable; and ever since, nature had rebelled with inexplicable repugnance against his breaking it.

The clock struck ten as the carriage drew up at an inn in a suburban parish. Here he had arranged that they were to be married after remaining in it during the fortnight required by law.

A waiter led the way upstairs to a sitting-room. At the foot of the staircase stood a group of chambermaids and others,

whispering significantly. Rupert silently ascended the stairs, and entered the sitting-room. The waiter lighted the candles and withdrew.

An irrevocable fact shows its nature most convincingly when the body, or that which has been carrying it, is in a state of rest after movement: it is difficult for the mind to comprehend the fixity of the irrevocable while the body is sensible of rapid motion.

Rupert grew calm—calmer than he had been for the past six weeks—horribly calm. He understood his position, and all that belonged to it: where he fixed his eyes, he now saw.

He saw—and his eyes became riveted where they were fixed. He saw evidences of emotion inexplicably strong—so strong, that he saw her quiver in every limb, though she was partially veiled and her face was averted. He saw—and that sight monopolised his instincts with sudden force. In another instant he was standing by her

side. She trembled so violently that he was obliged to support her. He led her to the open window, gently raised her veil, and started back with a sharp cry of horror.

It was—not Caterina—it was Edith that stood before him.

Crowded into that moment, all the events of his life passed before him—horribly distinct: then followed a torrent of suppositions—conflicting, unpersuasive, incredible, yet not impossible. Belief and disbelief hung back from him equidistantly.

This is soon written, but it passed yet sooner. Necessity of action was the one and only thing clearly evident: it pressed upon his brain from all points of view. But how could he take the initiative in such a case? What could he do? What could he say? How could he express what—merciful heaven! *What could he express?* It were idle to explain these interrogatives.

But, strange as it may appear on the sur-

face of experience, Edith had become calm in manner, though terrifically pale. She disengaged herself from his support, turned towards him, and said :

“I think I must be mad. I have doubted many times lately whether my brain were right or not—I have had such horrible delusions. I have hardly known where I was. I have . . . Why are you grown so dreadfully like Edgar? You are more so than ever now. In mercy tell me—am I mad? Has time stood still since I last saw him in the gallery at Ernsford? Or are you he? Why have you looked so like him, and spoken to me sadly—as *he* spoke after . . . after I ruined his peace and my own? Why did you write these notes to me—if it was not to drive me to perdition or a madhouse?”

She took two notes from the front of her dress, and held them—her hand shook so fearfully that she could not be said to have held them out to him. Rupert caught sight

of his own handwriting within the crumpled envelopes. He eagerly clutched them: they were written by himself, but directed by another and, apparently, a feigned hand.

"Why did you write that?" said Edith, in a wailing tone.

There was something in her manner so terribly simple—so miserably at variance with the situation, that Rupert almost doubted her sanity and his own; yet both were of sounder mind at that moment than they had been for some weeks past.

She opened one of the notes, as it lay in his hand, and, pointing to one passage in it, said:

"Why did you write that—that? Rupert! why did you write these words, there—as if they had been written by *him*? I take no account of the rest. Why did you do this?"

Rupert looked where her finger pointed, and saw these words in his own handwriting:

" . . . Therefore, if I have not been deceived by the strength of my own hopes, I *am*, by the reality of truth, though not by priority of date, the first: I represent the *numerical first*. And if reality of devotion——"

He had barely glanced at these words, when Edith put her fingers before them, and, pointing to a particular line in the other note, said, in a yet more wailing voice:

"Rupert! for God's sake, why did you write this?"

The words she pointed to were as follows:

" . . . At half-past nine this evening, in Park Lane, close to Grosvenor Gate. I have arranged everything. My future life is yours."

Rupert was so completely stunned with amazement, that all other feelings were, for a time, suspended. He turned his eyes from the note to Edith, and looked at both

without seeming to notice either. Edith drew back her hand quickly from the note, and wept passionately.

"I am the greatest villain or the greatest fool alive—and I believe I am both," said Rupert, in a low, intense tone. "The awful complication of evil that I have brought about must drive me mad, if I am not so already."

He looked at her with a quick, involuntary glance, more nervous than intentional, and added :

"Edith! I hated you as much and as bitterly as the forbearance of manhood would allow. I had reason to do so—but not to act as I have done. I hardly know what I *have* done lately as regards *you*. I am bewildered at present—those notes . . . I can't understand them: I shall understand something presently. But I know this—I know that I have been a scoundrel, *even towards you*."

"Even towards me!" repeated Edith, in

the same tone of misery becalmed by hopelessness. "Even towards me! You are right. I deserve no pity——"

"Don't, don't talk so," interrupted Rupert, with sudden and expressive vehemence. "*As a man*, I cannot let you hear all this. You are now in my power, and therefore under my protection."

"The generosity you are showing towards me this night," said Edith, "is worthy of a very different subject than that which has ended by bringing us here. I deserve no pity from any one, and least of all from you ; and yet, despise and hate me as you will, you cannot feel half the loathing that I have for myself, these two years. At times I have tried to make some excuses to myself, in the vain hope of easing the horrible burden that weighed upon my soul. I plead none now ; I wish for none. Rupert, you must listen to me, indeed you must ; you must listen, and you must help

me, for the sake of him whose memory can not be—dishonoured except through me!

“I have no other object now than to do both,” said Rupert, with rapid utterance. “Tell me what I shall *do*.”

“Take me away from here,” she replied, in a firm but low voice. “Take me away, but not to London. I cannot go back to . . . at least not now. Take me to— to Moorfield. Take me—I mean send me. Put me into a carriage that will take me to the train to-night.”

“I will do so,” he said, solemnly. “I will go by the same train, in a different carriage, and see you safe as far as Tedminster.”

He left the room, and ordered the ostler to put to at once. The ostler stared for an instant; but the tone in which the order was given prevented any question respecting it. He returned to the sitting-room, and said:

“I *have* assisted you by ordering the

carriage, which will be ready in a few minutes. I *am* listening."

Edith tightened the strings of the two thick veils she wore, drew them over her face in readiness for the journey, and said:

"Yes! listen for the sake of *his* memory. I am willing to bear as much contempt as I can bear without casting ridicule on him for having loved me. All blame not entailing *that*, is mine legitimately, but none beyond—none that could cast a shadow on *him*. I am now speaking of the time when we were at Carlsbad."

"Yes! speak of that time and of all that happened since," said Rupert, turning very pale, or, more correctly, very much paler than when he had re-entered the room. "Tell me of that time. Tell me of all . . . since."

"I will," she answered. "I will give you such an account as I have rendered to no one, not even to my own conscience—not (God help me!) not even in prayer."

I tell it to *you* because you are *his* brother, and because I stand at this moment in a horrible position with regard to you—a position at which my soul sickens!”

“Rest assured of this one thing,” she continued, after a moment’s pause. “Rest assured of it, as on the most solemn oath I could make before heaven. I loved him—loved him completely, and with my whole heart and soul—loved him, not from caprice or the force of early association, but for himself as I knew him to be—himself distinct from all others. And we should have been well-assorted then, as I then was—and yet more, as I then might have become. And I could—I did make him happy then; and my own happiness was too intense for words to express. And he had the power of influencing my mind, and even my wishes. I was but seventeen and ill-educated. My memory had been crammed for show, but my mind not instructed at all;

and I had not the power within me to instruct myself, as Constance had. I wanted *his* protection and guidance. You cannot, you never can understand, the force of bad influence on a young, uninstructed girl, who has neither religious principles to guide, nor experience to warn her. Your mind cannot possibly take in the force of it, because to comprehend it you must feel it, pass through it, and suffer from it. You cannot possibly conceive the mesmeric power of bad influence when exerted by a mother in a spirit of affection. You cannot know how easily a girl is *mystified*; you cannot know what obstacles lie in a woman's way when, having once turned aside from the right, she longs and struggles to get back again; you cannot know the barriers and pitfalls that front her at every turn. But I never can forgive myself. I wish you to know that. I wish you to know how horrible the retribution has been—how my inner life since . . . since I was

married has been one of sorrow, remorse and forcible deception—one of heart-yearnings to what I had lost, and of ineffective struggles to resist them as a sin. I never *did*, never *could*, forgive myself, even from the first; and I was so horrified at what I had done, that in shame and despair I withheld my confidence from one who had been, and would have been, my good genius—I mean Constance.”

Rupert turned suddenly paler than before, and his hand shook so much that the two notes fell on the floor. He picked them up, put them into Edith’s hand, and said:

“Not *her* name to me . . . now. I avoided her, when——. But if I speak of this, I shall be unfit to listen. Tell me of the last six weeks. Tell me how——”

“I will,” answered Edith,” averting her face, and instinctively drawing her veil closer over her face. “I will. I deserve the humiliation of telling it. His image

was always before me—I seemed to see him and hear him always. And you came, looking and speaking like him. You had grown so dreadfully like him, it seemed a part of the same dream. Horrible, horrible punishment of Heaven! You were made a delusion to me; and you had a dreadful power over me, now I know what it was, the fascination of hatred. You hated me because I destroyed *him*.”

“You have told me the truth—which I *would not see* when the sight would have prevented me from doing things that are unpardonable,” said Rupert, in a hollow voice. “But tell me, how did you receive those two notes?”

“By the post,” answered Edith, pointing to the envelopes.

Rupert for the first time examined the directions accurately. A light seemed to break upon the mystery.

“Most horrible retribution!” he ex-
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claimed, after looking at it for several seconds.

"They were written to some one else," said Edith.

Rupert coloured with shame. The colour came and went so quickly over his pale face, that it might be said to flash over — rather than overspread it.

"They were written to some one else," continued Edith. "I am a woman; and I saw it the moment you recognised me in this room. You wish to spare me further humiliation, so you try to conceal this from me: but I entreat you not to do so. *I* have not told all."

"And *I* will tell you all," answered Rupert, after a moment's reflection. "Those letters were written to — to — Do you remember Molini's picture of Francesca da Rimini?"

Edith started back, and pushed aside her veil, as if to see that she had heard aright.

"Retribution!" she said, at length, drawing the veil again over her face. "You spoke of horrible retribution, but you know not yet *how* horrible. She was the girl who left Perringston with Lord Ravensdale six years ago — she thought he would have married her afterwards, just at the time when he went to Carlsbad. I heard that it was Sir John Campion's fault. He may never have meant to do so, nor do I believe that he did: but *she* believed it. . . . And I never shall forget the expression of her countenance when I saw her as I returned from church on my wedding-day. She loved him; and I know what a passionate woman is capable of when her jealousy is moved. Rupert, she has made you a cat's-paw to ruin my reputation!"

The colour came and went very quickly in Rupert's cheek; for it is not in the nature of manhood to hear such an announcement without an uprushing of tingling hot blood.

But that hot flush subsided instantly, and he said without hesitation :

"Thank heaven ! It seems a strange thing to be thankful for ; but it is a relief. I ... I ... If I am mad, I am mad — I don't know whether I am or not . . . But it seemed as if I had — I hardly know what ——"

"Rupert," said Edith, interrupting him with startling energy of manner. "Before we leave this room, I have one thing to ask of you. Can you forgive me for — what I did to — Edgar?"

"And you ask this of me?" answered Rupert. "Of me — after what I have done in the last six weeks? What right have I to judge you — I who have done my best to injure you?"

"You are the nearest to him in blood," said Edith, with increasing energy. "You represent him in every way. You are so like him now — so dreadfully like him, that if you refuse me this, I shall think—I shall

be sure—I *am* sure that it is he himself standing here in this place, refusing to forgive me. I shall feel that even from beyond the grave—he cannot; and it will drive me to the lowest depths of despair. Rupert! My life, since that fatal day at Carlsbad, has been one of remorse: I wish it to be now one of repentance—repentance for that, and for all the violations of every duty which have followed as its consequence. The horrible position in which I now stand before you, shuddering at myself, has opened my eyes and shown me much. But if you will not say that you forgive me, I shall feel that *he* has cursed me. Rupert! I once was very dear to him. For his sake, say that you forgive me!”

Rupert hesitated, as if struggling with himself; then took her arm, and, as he led her to the carriage, which had just come round to the door, said:

“From my heart and soul I do — as hope to be forgiven by ——”

Edith involuntarily repeated, with a slightly interrogative emphasis, his last word — "By?"

"By . . . those I have injured," he replied in a quivering voice, as he handed her into the carriage.

He stood by the carriage for a moment, then shut the door quickly, and bounded up on the box.

CHAPTER X.

BUT had Sir John Campion's acuteness and knowledge of the world enabled him to form anything like a pre-conception of that which concerned himself so nearly ?

Nay, but he was on a track where analogy would not serve him for a compass. Nothing was farther from his calculations of probabilities than the thing which had actually happened.

But he did more than most of us can boast of having done ten times in our lives : he made the most of the one fair opportunity that he had in the matter. The opportunity was this :

On the same evening there was a concert at Lady Rossden's ; and soon after ten o'clock Sir John went there, gloomy and

taciturn as might have been expected under the impending circumstances. He felt his impending sacrifice with all annoyance and no satisfaction: he felt that he was being fooled. He suspected Caterina of everything except what she had actually done, and wished very openly that he had not committed himself just when he did.

In this frame of mind he went to Lady Rossden's—not because he had any idea of amusing himself and others, according to his wont, but rather because he had not thought of *not* going; and in some measure, perhaps, because he wished to get away from himself, and to freshen his wits for the question—how to steer between being ludicrously fooled on the one hand, and breaking his plighted word on the other?

“They say he’s going to be married to his housemaid,” said one rail-lounger to another as he passed near them.

“No, no; you’ve got the wrong end of it. He *is* married to a *danseuse*. He

married her the other day in Paris," said another.

"Not a bit of it," said a third. "He was *sold* by some girl in the country: she threw him over for some one else."

"The right nail generally—but never on the head. How sharp society is!" muttered Sir John, whose ears had the faculty of hearing all the conversation within a radius of two paces in a crowded room.

A few minutes afterwards Lord Ravensdale entered the room. Sir John looked upon him with definite and indefinite suspicion, eyed him accordingly, and remarked to himself mentally:

". . . Comes here—not with his wife, to make a show and pretend they're all right together—but by himself, and without his hands in his pockets—half bowing and plausible, as if he wanted people's votes for something. What the devil is he up to?

"'This candle burns not clear: 'tis I must snuff it.'"

"And I *will*, too — for there's a thief in it, and the grease is dirtying my fingers already."

He edged away from the spot where he was standing, went out of the nearest door, passed along the landing of the staircase into a back room, and stationed himself under the lee of a door near which Lord Ravensdale was.

"“My honourable friend no longer,”’ as Burke said to Fox *in re* the French Revolution :” Sir John remarked to his own mind, as he took up his position, with eyes, ears and understanding opened to an extra width. “I can’t tell what you’re at; but I’m morally certain that it’s something you ought to be kicked for. I wish I were a woman now, just for ten minutes only, — no longer, as comparative sexuality goes; and then I should see, perhaps, what’s passing inside that fellow’s thick skull. Will no woman help me? Miss Grahame? Miss Grahame? Miss Grahame? Do I

know her well enough? And can I venture on such a subject, seeing what things hang to it? And . . . and — I think I'll stay where I am just now. Perhaps I shall hear something."

He did stay where he was, and he heard something.

A song had just ended, and Lady Rosdden took the opportunity of speaking to Lord Ravensdale.

"What have you done with Edith?" she said. "She's not here."

"Yes. What have you done with her?" said Lady Julia, who was standing near. "You're changing places; *you* taking to society, and *she* thinking it a bore. How very jolly of her!"

Lord Ravensdale moved away from Lady Julia, drew nearer to her mother, and making up a face, answered in a low voice:

"I — I thought — I mean I had hoped she was here. I was waiting to come with her; and, after some time, I found she was

not in the house. . . . And — and she had not gone in the carriage — that's what's so strange. . And nobody had called for her, either — for I asked, thinking she might have gone somewhere else first. I — I said I was coming here, too . . . Upon my word it makes one very anxious. What on earth can have happened? I shall go home at once."

"Oho!" thought Sir John, whose eyes, ears and mind had taken in the above and something more. "That's the line of country, is it? I think I can see something. You want either to get rid of your wife or to get up a case of 'faults on both sides,' and that sort of thing. It can't be the first, I think. . . . But it looks very ugly, though, if the whole thing isn't a lie.

"But who . . . in all this time that I have been out of London? And what has all that to do with Caterina and the note I saw in her hand? How ludicrously impotent one is! I can only wait and see

what turns up—and the worst can do no less. It's no joking matter to *me*, though!"

He left the room more disheartened than he ever remembered to have been, and passed several acquaintances without seeing them; therefore the reader may gather from the analogy of self-confidence that the truth was hovering somewhere not very far off—as in fact it was.

Meanwhile he strolled into an inner room, and sat down to a writing-table.

"I'll write him a note," thought he aloud. "I ought to have done it before; I promised the other I would — and in his last moments, too. How could I take that absurd idea into my head when I met him yesterday morning at Notting-hill?"

He wrote a few lines, sealed the note, directed it to Rupert, and, putting it into his pocket, said to himself:

"That will do, as far as *he* is concerned. But . . . what else?"

As he was about rising from his chair

to leave the room, he heard a quick, nervous, intentional step coming into it. He looked up and saw Constance walking very decidedly up to him.

He rose, and stood still without speaking, for in her manner there was something which carried respect to the confines of awe—it was the self-possession of deliberate, self-approved purpose. She came close to him, gave a rapid glance at both the doors, and said:

“Sir John Campion—Your friendship with the late Lord Elfintower, the confidence I have personally in yourself, and a strong conviction of necessity, must be my excuse for asking a question that will seem extraordinary and impertinent. Do you know who was the model for this picture of Francesca da Rimini, that Lord Rossden bought the other day?”

She turned to a recess in the room, where, on a chair by the wall, was a half-sized finished picture, taken from the

sketch that Rupert had seen in Molini's studio two years before. This she pointed to with a gesture so self-forgetfully tragic, that Sir John did not at first even look where she pointed—his eyes were riveted on her.

"That picture, I mean — on the chair," she said, motioning him towards it. He looked at it, changed colour, and looked again. Constance noticed his expression, and watched him as if she would read his answer in his countenance. He felt her eyes on him, and dropped his — it was the first time he had ever done so.

"Can you tell me?" she asked, after waiting about half a minute.

"I can, and I cannot," said Sir John, after a moment's hesitation. "There are things that you must not hear, because their existence is a standing insult to womanhood — a standing reproach to manhood."

"I know that," answered Constance, in a

melancholy but firm tone. "How can I do otherwise? When the atmosphere is pestiferous, how can one fail to perceive it?"

"But," said Sir John, "purity should be shielded."

Constance shook her head, looked again round the room, and, coming a step nearer to him, replied:

"Yes! a thousand times—yes! But duty to the living and the dead now forbids a silence that would only be a wretched caricature of modesty."

A deep blush suffused her cheek, and she added with effort:

"I made a solemn promise, and . . . that promise forces me to speak to you now. *Who was* the model of that picture?"

"Caterina Guarini," replied Sir John, fairly taken by surprise.

"She was at Perringston when I was a child?" asked Constance in the same tone.

"She was," answered Sir John, who now

began to feel that he must answer whatever question she asked him.

"And then . . . Lord Ravensdale?" she continued.

Sir John bowed assent. She blushed painfully, and tears started with irrepressible force into her eyes. She turned away to hide them.

"Sir John," she said at length, coming back to the spot she had left, "I *must* say on to the end, at all risks — come what may. I have so strong a feeling of the necessity, that I can see neither right nor left away from it. The message you delivered to me from Edgar in his last moments places us in a peculiar relation to each other. You know then that a promise and . . . and something more gives me an interest in his brother more than . . . than others have . . ."

"And if ever there was a fool — to throw away such a chance," thought Sir John. "He deserves to be married to an English-

born lionne, and live half the year in Paris with her."

"You know so much," she continued — her cheek growing crimson and deadly pale alternately; "so *much* that I may ——"

"You may, indeed," said Sir John; "and if in any way, by any exertion of any kind, I can serve you, you may command me at any moment; and I shall feel it to be a very great pleasure and a very great honour."

"I am deeply grateful," she said; "but there is a dreadful mystery hanging over him . . . and others now. I cannot tell *what it is* . . . and we are going to leave town. We were to have left yesterday."

"Then," thought he, "there *was* something in his being at Notting-hill yesterday morning. He kept out of my way, too. She must have heard, discovered or divined something. It would serve him right to pass the rest of his life in a post-honeymoon, *tête-à-tête* with Julia Perringston."

"I cannot tell *what it is*," repeated Constance, coming close to him, and speaking almost in a whisper. "I mean — I cannot tell what *anything* is. I have heard whispers this evening that madden me to think of. Edith, too. . . . I can't tell you what I mean ; but go and see — hear, find out . . . find out something. Go !"

Without question, reply or hesitation, Sir John left the room and the house. He walked straight to Lord Ravensdale's, as a matter of course, without even making up his mind to do so.

The opening of the door was the first circumstance suggestive of detail ; and hesitation and mental abstraction are not qualities wherewith to ingratiate a sleepy hall-porter at midnight. But Sir John was fertile of resource. He said in a friendly tone :

"Do you know if Lord and Lady Ravensdale are gone to Lady RosSDen's to-night — or where else? I wanted to see

them before I go out of town ; and it's not certain that I may not go to-morrow morning."

"His Lordship went there, I know, Sir John, because he told me he was going there," answered the hall porter. "Her Ladyship hasn't been home since a quarter before nine; and the maid nor no one don't know where she's gone. Her Ladyship wasn't dressed for company."

"Thank you. It's of no consequence. I don't suppose I *shall* go to-morrow," said Sir John, with imperturbable indifference of manner.

He jumped into the nearest cab, and drove to Rupert's house. A long time elapsed before the door was answered, when the reply was that he had left town for some time.

"Did he say for how long?" asked Sir John.

"No, sir. His Lordship didn't say nothing about it," answered the housemaid,

standing in curl papers, with the street door in her hand.

"How, when, and where did he go?" asked Sir John in a sharp and sudden manner, well calculated to entrap a true reply, if necessary.

"At a quarter before nine, sir, in a hired carriage and post horses," answered the housemaid, very simply. "I don't know where his Lordship went. He didn't tell no one in the house; and I didn't hear what he said to the postboy, which his lordship spoke so low, sir."

"This looks very ugly," thought Sir John. "I can see how it has come about with *her*. . . . It is a sad story all through—a very, very sad story. I haven't heart to say more: it's very, very sad—and that's all I am able to think about it. But what was he doing at Notting Hill? Why did he look bothered when he met me? He had no idea that I had anything to do with *her*—*that I know*. He must have been one of

the two who gave the name of Molini — Ravensdale must have been the other. A very dignified position I've been standing in altogether! If this isn't a slap in the face to good intentions, I don't know what is . . . I'll be hanged if I pave *that* kind of infernal regions with them."

He jumped into another cab, and went back to Lady Rossden's.

He found Constance in the cloak room, and taking her on one side, said in a very low voice:

"Why did you notice that picture so particularly?"

She became paler than ever, and answered:

"Because I met her in Kensington Gardens about two years ago — and pulled her child out of the water; and because . . . because — that was why."

"Did you ever see him with her there?" asked Sir John. "Did you not *often* . . . perhaps? If you will give me no answer

I will take it for *yes*. Believe me, it is important — or I would not ask it . . . But don't be alarmed by what I have asked you. It's only a complication of strange appearances — that's all."

She was silent: he had his answer — the answer he expected. He turned away, and after talking to a few other people, as if nothing had happened, left the house, knowing and suspecting much more than when he had entered it two hours before.

"I must work it out," he muttered to himself, as he went home. "I must work it out, come upon her with it suddenly, and . . . and . . . run the risk of being mistaken? But I'm *not* mistaken, though, this time."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEXT MORNING.

THE next morning! Of all the every-day domestic terms belonging to universal language, none perhaps has scared so many human beings as that very common-place one — *the next morning*. The very words teem with life and its saddest realities.

The first thing that comes under the reader's notice is one of those scenes which make the nerves laugh and the heart weep — a scene in which genuine feeling loses its legitimate pathos and dignity, by reflection from that which is ungraceful, mean and farcically absurd.

It was about ten o'clock. Mrs. Grahame sat before her dressing-table, self-serene as regarded her own dignity and that of those

ostensibly connected with her. Spuckers entered the room, but not into her mistress's views.

Her face was red and shining, her eyes round and full; her movements were vigorous, not to say rough; her breathing was audible in the form of two or three expirations startlingly loud. She seized Mrs. Grahame's hair in one hand, and a large hairbrush in the other, in such a manner as caused the latter to bound up a whole inch off her chair, and exclaim :

"Now, Spuckers, I won't have you be so rough."

"Lor, ma'am — it ain't of no use a talking. It's too much for me, it is," said Spuckers, putting the hairbrush down, and her apron to her eyes.

Each tried to hold her tongue till the other had begun to say something; therefore, in about a quarter of a minute, the dialogue recommenced, and went on briskly thus :

Mrs. Grahame. "Well! what . . . a . . . is . . . is — Why don't you do my hair?"

Spuckers. "Well 'm, it isn't neglectfulness — I'm sure. But one has one's feelings, and so long as I've lived in the fam'ly, I mean yours and all, and I'm sure I never thought I should live to see the day, I didn't ——"

Mrs. Grahame. "See *what* day?"

Spuckers. "I never heard talk of anything like it. Of all the awfulest things . . . to think it should ever come to this! And I know it's true, though I don't believe a word of it, which it came direct from the servants. And the footmen and all knows it: and they've been a-sending about all over the place: and nobody knows nothink of what's gone of them: and they know'd, 'm, it's him, which he's not come back."

Mrs. Grahame. "Goodness, gracious,

Spuckers! what *is* the matter? What *is* it? What *is* it?"

Spuckers. "Boo-hoo! To think I should come to be told such a thing . . . and them nasty great rude fellows in their powder 'll be grinning about by and by (I should like to take and box their ears for them), and a-talking all about. And I was told it the first thing this morning (they always say bad news flies quick) — the first thing this morning — that is, as soon as I was down. It's my opinion he must have been a-looking out for it, he must — and a-hoping it *would* be, for some of his own purposes, which they *do* say he's no better than he should be, or else how, I should like to know, would they all have been a-hollering and bawling about the place before eight o'clock this morning, which his lordship, I'm sure, wasn't where he had a ought to have been not to have known it straight-forward and that. And to think that I should come to be told such a thing as

this — I that put on her white sating slip to her first ball she ever went to, with seven flounces of deep Brussels lace that cost five guineas a yard and white roses; and then her wedding gown and the veil that cost three hundred pounds if it cost a penny; and so beautiful as she looked too with the orange flowers, and although it had a *ought* to have all been for Lord Elfin-tower — him as is dead and gone — and then this wouldn't never have happened. And I sat down and had a good cry about it before you was awake this morning. I never thought to see this — never; and I won't believe it's true — that I won't. And I'm sure I wish, and there's others wish too, we'd never gone to that nasty foreign place where the servants was cut down to four meals a day and no beer, only sour stuff they called wine — and pretty wine it was too; and that Count Shinebeak a-riding about on a big horse which he couldn't sit upon it properly, and all them griffins and

other foreigners a-seeing what they could get out of you, 'm, which they haven't got no money themselves and only lives by swindling, it's my opinion. And would you believe it, 'm? I'm sure I'd never credit such a thing, not I; and should like to box all their ears, I should, for going about atelling such things ——"

Mrs. Grahame (spinning round off her seat with extreme rapidity, and bobbing up and down opposite Spuckers). "Oh dear! What? what? what?"

Spuckers. "Why, 'm, it's Miss Edith's been and ran off with Master Rupert; least-wise (with a look of offended feminine dignity) it's Master Rupert's run off with her, 'm ——"

Mrs. Grahame (with involuntary loudness of voice). "What?"

Spuckers. "Yes, 'm, and who'd a thought it? and, though I won't believe it, I know it's true."

Mrs. Grahame (reseating herself, and

burying her face in her hands). "It—it—it's very impertinent of you to say so. It's a— Boo-hoo!"

A voice from the half-open doorway. "Boo-hoo!" (*Enter Miss Donaldson.*)

Mrs. Grahame. "Hm! well, I'm sure ——"

Miss Donaldson comes forward with extended arms, and embraces Mrs. Grahame with considerable muscular power. Mrs. Grahame struggles and pants.

Miss Donaldson. "Boo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo! Oh! my dear Mrs. Grahame. I never shall get over it."

Mrs. Grahame (disengaging herself by a violent effort of weight). "I—I—I don't know what you mean, I'm sure. I'm sure I'm very sorry if—I would have come to see you, if I had known that you were in sorrow—I would; but I must see the dentist in twenty—minutes, see the dentist in twenty minutes, and ——"

Miss Donaldson. "Oh dear; dreadful! That I should be the first person to ——"

Mrs. Grahame. "Yes; only twenty minutes."

Miss Donaldson (half aside). "How very dreadful! And it will be all over London before she ——"

Mrs. Grahame. "I'm very sorry; but, if I am not there in time ——"

Miss Donaldson. "All over London; it had reached Lady Rosssden's ears already."

Mrs. Grahame wished she could reach Miss Donaldson's.

Miss Donaldson (in continuation). "I was there by appointment this morning at nine o'clock, to see the dear girls before they all leave town. And Lord Ravensdale came in (I shall always hate him, though I know he couldn't help it) and he said . . Boo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo . . hoo!"

Spuckers (who never had much opinion of Miss Donaldson) "Well, 'm, we knows

all about it, which it wasn't decent in his lordship to go about a-telling everybody as soon as he could; and it's all a wicked story, it is; and, begging your pardon, 'm, you had a ought to know better. And ——"

Mrs. Grahame (with sudden vehemence) "Yes, Miss Donaldson, it's all very well to come now ——"

Spuckers. "A condoling with you, 'm, and all the while a-taking his lordship's part, which it's my belief she's been a-doing behind your back ——"

Mrs. Grahame. (*panting*) ". . . you—after being with her three years—and having every chance, I'm sure in every way, and nothing else to do but to bring her up properly ——"

Spuckers. "—and a 'aving a table to herself and a footman all to herself ——"

Mrs. Grahame. "—and costing as much as two extra carriage horses and a man ——"

Miss Donaldson (getting very red in the

face, and sniffing the air strongly). "I—I don't know what you mean. He, he, he! Grief has bewildered her. I . . . I . . . a—good morning, my dear Mrs. Grahame: I—I am very much hurried. Good-bye."
(*Retreats rapidly towards the door and opens it.*)

Spuckers (edging across the room after her). "And a-costing as much as two hextra carriage horses and a man."

Miss Donaldson (waxing furious beyond the power of concealment). "You'd be turned away if Mr. Grahame heard you!"
(Bangs the door to.)

Spuckers (running and opening the door after her). "And a-doing nothink for it neither." (Re-shuts the door and re-enters the room. Miss Donaldson is emphatically astonished.)

* * * * *

It was little more than half-past ten o'clock when Spuckers took the last word away from Miss Donaldson, yet, by that

time, three or four families, their servants, and such of their tradespeople as bring their commodities to houses early in the morning, had heard some more or less distorted account of the occurrences detailed in the last chapter. As early as ten o'clock Sir John Campion went to Lord Ravensdale's house, and asked if Lady Ravensdale was at home.

"Not come back, Sir John," was the significant answer. "His Lordship is gone to Lord Rossden's, to see if they know anything where she is."

"The devil he is!" muttered Sir John between his teeth, as soon as he was outside the house. "I'll go there after him. He ~~is~~ making up a case. Aha! I've often heard him grumble at having no heir . . . Caterina is *very sharp*—too sharp for her own interest—so sharp that she outwits herself: he's too selfish to compromise himself. They've been playing cunning against each other. I see it all now. I see what her game has been."

By this time he was at Lord Rossden's house, where he found the drawing-room in a buzz of excitement and lamentation. Instead of saying, "Good morning," Lady Rossden began:

"Poor Lord Ravensdale ——"

"Blackguard Lord Ravensdale, if it's all the same to you, my dear cousin," said Sir John, looking very grim.

"My dear John—what *do* you mean?" she asked in a voice of most unfeigned surprise.

"Blackguard, very blackguard, most excessively blackguard, most inconceivably blackguard Lord Ravensdale," repeated Sir John in a tone of ineradicable conviction. "Don't waste your dear, kind sympathies upon him, between now and when we meet again. And, listen! Deny *everything*, on *my* authority."

He left the house before she had time to recover from her surprise, jumped into the first Hansom he could find, drove to

Notting Hill, and appeared suddenly before Caterina, who was writing at a table. Without a moment's delay he said very slowly and distinctly

"Lord Ravensdale promised verbally to marry you if he could divorce his present wife, and you have been trying to father the scheme. To do so, you have sacrificed Lord Elfintower and a girl who really loves him. We part at once and finally. I am going to my lawyer's now, to settle 400*l.* a year on you; but I must insist on one thing: you must tell me exactly *how* you did it."

Caterina was deadly pale, but the devil was roused within her.

She rose defiantly from her chair; her eyes flashed southern fire; she was silent only because words were, for the moment, less expressive.

"I cannot remain here long," said Sir John, in answer to this mute defiance; "but I warn you that if you do not tell me

every particular directly, I shall at once make the whole affair public, names and all—come what may to myself and all concerned in it. I am very sorry that I am obliged to speak discourteously, but——”

“Spare your brain the labour of inventing sarcasms to carry off threats which you dare not execute,” answered Caterina doggedly. “I will *not* tell you anything at all. Do what you like: I will have no annuity from you: I will stay not a moment longer in this house. Do what you like: I defy you.”

Sir John said nothing for some moments: he watched her silently—and tears came into his eyes.

“Horribly touching!” he said to himself at length. “All this recklessly done for his sake—in full confidence of the man who deceived her before. And she would trust him again and again.”

“I make no conditions,” he continued, turning to Caterina. “The annuity is a

debt—it is yours, and there's an end of it ; and as to threats—I should never threaten any woman. But I am bound to *warn* you—to give you your choice: I *must* make the thing public, in justice to others, unless you save me the necessity by doing what will enable me to do that justice. And when I tell you that the girl whose happiness you have ruined is the girl who saved your child's life in Kensington Gardens —”

It was well that Constance had furnished him with this the only weapon that could strike home, for he might have tried any and every other argument for ever without moving her a hair's breadth from her doggedness: the English half of her nature had caught fire from the southern, retaining its own natural persistency, whilst the latter retained its own peculiar impatience of contradiction. To speak in what is familiarly called plain English, he might have talked till he was black in the face.

But he had said the right thing at last. She trembled much, and almost lost her self-control.

"If I tell you what you wish to know," said she, "shall I be of use to her? Will it undo any part of the harm I have done her?"

"It will certainly undo much — probably all," he replied.

The colour rushed into her cheek as she said with rapid utterance :

"Then listen — for I cannot repeat! Nothing else could make me say it at all . . . But will nothing else undo it? I don't believe you. I ——"

"If you won't, you won't," said Sir John. "I can't make you do it. You have the power to make *some* compensation . . . and the power to *seal the injury by a voluntary act* of the blackest ingratitude that ever ——"

"But how much do you want to know? How much will be sufficient for her?"

"The whole details. Less would be useless."

Caterina bit her lips; the colour again rushed tumultuously into her cheeks.

"Nothing else on earth could make me do it," said she; "nothing else. I would die sooner than tell you . . . I did encourage Lord Elfintower, then, I respected him, and hated myself for entrapping him by his sympathies and his generous nature; but I did it because a stronger feeling prompted me — the same feeling that has made me hideously ungrateful to you. I knew that Lady Ravensdale was much and strangely influenced by his likeness to his brother, and I conceived the idea that, tempest-tossed as she was, she might possibly *find her heart puzzled* between the memory of the one and the live resemblance of the other; therefore, when I met him, which I did frequently, I exerted myself as much as possible to persuade him to go and see her often for his brother's sake."

Lord Elfintower proposed to me verbally on the day when you saw Lord Ravensdale's note in my hand. I interrupted him — saying that he must not stay in this house, because I was watched; in fact, I virtually made him write. His note I put into another envelope, and, disguising my handwriting, directed it to Lady Ravensdale. This, and another letter which I wrote to Lord Ravensdale, telling him of what I had done, I put in the post myself at Knightsbridge. Lord Elfintower wrote again the next day, naming the hour at which we were to leave town; this I also directed to Lady Ravensdale, and put it into the post as before. About eight o'clock on that evening I went to Lord Ravensdale's house, shabbily dressed, closely veiled, and under an assumed name, to tell him what I had done. I had two reasons for doing what I did; I hated Lady Ravensdale, and . . . I wanted her to be divorced — of course I did . . . And I hate myself

for doing this; I hate myself for everything that I have said and done these last six weeks; but I would do it all again and again. Leave me now — leave me to myself! I cannot see you any more, or stay here, or owe anything more to you. I was forced to deceive you; I am sorry for it, but I would do the same again and again.”

“It is you who are most deceived,” said Sir John; “you who are really to be pitied. You have done all this for a man who was weary of you, and your beauty, and your love, before he ever saw Edith Grahame. You smile scornfully. I know what that look means; it means that you have miserably deteriorated from what you once were; it means that mercenary and ambitious motives have entered into the question. Now you are deceived in this respect, as well as in the other; for Lord Ravensdale *can not* marry you. You think that divorces are to be had for asking, if anything can be proved against the wife; but you will find

that *collusion* invalidates any claim, however great. I mean to say this: If Lord Ravensdale proceeds for a divorce, I shall feel bound to protect *her*, for the sake of her sister and of him who is dead. I shall tell her of Lord Ravensdale's visits here; she will bring forward the whole thing—re-directed letters and all; you will be subpœnaed and obliged to own it in court. I leave you now to reflect on these things. I must see you again, when you are calmer; I cannot abandon you to your fate, as you wish me to do. I shall see you this day week, at the same hour, wherever you may be; but I shall hope and expect to find you here."

He left the house and walked away, feeling really saddened and humbled; but when he thought over the details of Caterina's confession, and reviewed the whole plot in cold blood, the antithesis was too strong—the combination too comic: he burst into a long and uncontrollable fit of laughter—laughter in renewed peals, that

grew stronger by repetition—laughter such as is very genuine at the time, but leaves an after-void in the heart.

* * * * *

Turn we back a few hours. It was three o'clock on that same morning when Rupert stood outside the platform of the station at Tedminster, and saw Edith get into a fly. She was so thickly veiled and cloaked that no one could have recognised her, unless prepared to do so.

Leaving his luggage at the station, Rupert started on foot for Ernsford. The air was chilly for the end of July; rain was drizzling steadily, after a last night's thunderstorm; the morning dawned slowly. It was five o'clock when he arrived—not at Ernsford Court, but at the village. Here he stopped, and, entering the church, walked up to the altar tomb, which had been placed there a few days before.

The sun had, ere this, begun to pierce the cold, grey mist, and, as Rupert stood

by the altar-tomb, its rays came aslant through a painted window, bathing the marble with a soft light of faintest rose-colour. By sudden comparison with the cold grey of retarded daylight and the aching chill at his own heart, that faint rose tint round the altar-tomb made the effigy seem almost alive.

He stood by it for some time powerless to think definitely. At length—it might have been a little within half an hour, reflection took the shape of words, and they ran thus:

“I have verified his words—and they were words of prophetic warning. . . . It *did* come upon me as he said, in an unexpected and doubtful form, through my higher instincts. And what has it brought me to? What has it brought others to?” I could find it in my heart to wish myself dead, if I believed in nothing beyond . . . And he said to me, speaking of Constance: “You will never do any good till you are

under her influence.' I felt that truth yesterday; and now I never *shall* do any good—never so long as this earth holds me alive."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MORNING AFTER THAT.

WE left Sir John Campion laughing a melancholy peal, at some two or three hundred yards from the house he had just left. The laughter ended abruptly in a deeper sigh than had escaped from him for years past. He walked on slower and slower, as if keeping back from something possibly avoidable.

"I must wait," he said to himself—"wait, and hope that something may turn up. I can do nothing—absolutely nothing. . . . It's no use swearing hard in the face of facts. . . . I'll keep out of sight until to-morrow morning, in hopes that the Grahames may then have heard something. If they have not, it's all up."

“ Si Dieu ne pourvoie à tout,
Le Diable emportera tout.”

“It’s all very well to laugh at a man being first entrapped by his bad humour and sympathies, and then sent off with the wrong lady ; it’s amusingly funny, facetious in the extreme—in a farce ; but in all my experience I never had to do with a complicated affair that was so thoroughly the reverse of a laughing matter.”

He *did* keep out of sight till the next morning, when he went to Mr. Grahame’s house between ten and eleven o’clock. He found Mrs. Grahame alone, and in a pitiable state of mind, or rather, in no state of mind at all, for mind seemed really in abeyance. She looked stupefied, and continued to cry gently.

An open letter from Edith lay on the table ; she pushed it to him, but said nothing.

The letter was an incoherent epitome of what has been told in the last few chapters.

A postscript stated that Rupert had left Ernsford three or four hours after his arrival, and gone abroad.

Sir John read it carefully, and lighted a taper.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Grahame, when she saw him crumple the letter in his hand and hold it to the flame.

"To burn this," answered Sir John in a very decided tone. "This is the *only* record, and it must be destroyed. Now listen to what I say! Her husband ill-treated her—no matter how—*that is my* business, but I pledge you my word that it *is* so; and I pledge you my word that he himself shall acknowledge it in writing. Very well, then; you understand? She left the house in consequence of ill-treatment, and she went to Moorfield because she thought you were there; for you know that you had originally meant to leave town three days ago, and she had not seen you

since you had decided to stay a few days longer. Is it not so?"

"Why, so it is, to be sure," said Mrs. Grahame, beginning to be much interested in this exposition of Sir John's views. "I wonder I never remembered that . . . It's quite clear why she went away."

"Of course it is," said Sir John. "But she was tired when she wrote—of course she was, after travelling all night—so her letter was written anyhow, you see; and that frightened you naturally. Just so."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, to clear up this unfortunate mistake," said Mrs. Grahame, drying her eyes.

"I have done really nothing," answered Sir John, rising to go — "nothing whatever. Only I thought you mightn't perhaps know so much about *him* as I do . . . She didn't complain, I know. No one else has seen that letter, I hope?"

"No one," answered Mrs. Grahame, with a kindly glance at the taper.

He left the house, and went straight to Lord Ravensdale's. He found him at breakfast in the library, and he plunged at once *in medias res*.

"You were trying to get up a private indignation-meeting at Rossden's, yesterday morning," he said.

"What's the good of talking in that way?" growled Lord Ravensdale, trying to hide his confusion behind the fumes of a grill.

Neither of them spoke during the next two minutes, but Sir John scrutinised much, and Lord Ravensdale ate much. The dialogue recommenced as follows:

Sir John. "Well, as I was saying, you tried to get up a private indignation meeting at Rossden's, yesterday."

Lord Ravensdale (in a low, tremulous growl). "What are you talking about?"

Sir John. "About your indignation-meeting."

Lord Ravensdale. "Indignation-meet-

ing be —— What's the use of turning everything into a joke? Can't you take anything seriously?"

Sir John. "I think you will find that I can, before you have finished that grill."

Lord Ravensdale. "Why—why—what are you talking about?"

Sir John. "About this indignation-meeting. I have told you so twice already, haven't I?"

Lord Ravensdale. "What about?"

Sir John. "About your wife!"

Lord Ravensdale. "Come now. It's no use trying to pooh-pooh *that*. You know very well ——"

Sir John. "Very well."

Lord Ravensdale. "And it's devilish unfriendly of you to come and make light of a thing that's so serious to me. I take it as very unkind of you."

Sir John. "And how do you suppose your wife will take it of *you*, that because she went for a few days to her father's

place without mentioning her intended journey to you, when you were not even in the house at the time she left it, got up the next morning an hour earlier than usual, and went about bawling that she had eloped?"

Lord Ravensdale (reddening, and rising in rabid wrath). "I tell you what, Campion—you're carrying it too far. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing."

Sir John. "But you *must* stand it, for I've not half done yet; and I don't leave this chair till you have heard all I have to say, and done all I have to require of you."

Lord Ravensdale (half squaring towards him). "The devil you won't, in my own house!"

Sir John. "Not unless I have to get up in order to put *you* down, which I *will* do in another minute, if you don't leave off blustering. I'm more than a match for you, if you take *that* line, as well as in the rights

of the case. Now don't try to bluster any more, but listen to what I have to tell you.

"You got up an indignation-meeting —"

Lord Ravensdale. "I tell you I did nothing of the kind."

Sir John. "If you don't hear me out, I'll send cads all over London hallooing it about the streets. Well, then — you got up an indignation-meeting——"

Lord Ravensdale (turning his back upon him). "Pish!"

Sir John. "An indignation-meeting upon your wife's reputation. You were preparing for it the night before — I saw and heard you at it: and no wonder that you were able to do so, when you knew all about it before ——"

Lord Ravensdale. "There's a limit to friendship and to endurance ——"

Sir John. "Two days before."

Lord Ravensdale. "If I have to fly the

country, or be hanged for it, I'll have a shot ——"

Sir John. "And not only knew all about it two days before, but preconcerted it."

Lord Ravensdale (seizing the poker).
"Do you see this?"

Sir John. "Yes, it's a poker, which I shall take away from you if you don't put it down directly. Now I warn you, for the last time, that I am not going to be played with. I have come here deliberately, and after much reflection, for a purpose which (so help me Heaven!) I will fulfil; and I give you now, once for all, the alternative — whether you will listen to me, or whether you will not. Very well, then. You got up an indignation-meeting, that you might thereat give evidence against your wife's reputation; and you did all you could, in other ways, to effect the same purpose. You did all this with a view to getting rid of her by divorce, which

you wish for, because you have no heir — and an heir you wish to have — for many reasons. Now, it so happens that instead of being off with Elfintower, as you hoped and schemed for, she is staying quietly at Moorfield, and therefore you will have the kindness to sit down at once and write a note to me, denying all that you stated before the indignation-meeting.”

Lord Ravensdale (colouring up to the roots of his hair). “I tell you once for all — I will not. I’ll fight it out here — in this room. I don’t care a ——”

Sir John. “Hear me out, and then bluster, if you feel so disposed. You gave Caterina Guarini a verbal promise of marriage in reversion after the contemplated divorce of your present wife. In consideration of this reversionary interest in a conjugal abstraction of yourself, she, by and with your consent and advice, made a cat’s-paw of Lord Elfintower in the following manner. She entrapped him, under

false pretences, into sending her a written proposal to elope, worded so that neither name appeared ; this note she forwarded to your wife. The following day she made him give her another note, in which the place and hour were named. This note she also forwarded to your wife. All this was arranged between you and her for the end already specified — which end you imagined to be attainable, because Lord Elfintower and your wife, having been brought up together like brother and sister, were often seen together at the opera, where you never by any chance went with her. But all this has been done to no purpose, for your wife did not rise to the bait—”

Lord Ravensdale. “Go on to the end ! But I saw her get into the carriage just by Grosvenor Gate.”

Sir John. “You did, did you ? And what were you doing there, hanging about at half-past nine o'clock — when you told Lady Rosden, in my hearing, that you had

been at home at that time, ready to go to her concert with your wife? But you were not aware that she had asked him to get a carriage for her, and to see her as far as the station — were you ?”

Lord Ravensdale (gruffly). “No, of course not.”

Sir John (aside). “Nor I either. (aloud) Well, *she* is at Moorfield, and *he* is abroad; I can prove both facts. Now it comes to this : Either you will sit down at once, and write a recantation of all that you stated before the indignation-meeting, or (so help me Heaven!) I will make the whole details public, and you will be cut by everybody. This is my ultimatum, and I am not going to offer it twice. You must choose at once, one way or the other.”

Lord Ravensdale ground his teeth, and came forward with the evident intention of “showing fight” then and there. Sir John sat still, fixed his eyes on those of Lord

Ravensdale, and kept them so fixed till, in the course of a minute or two, the latter gave way, and their owner, rolling into a chair by the writing-table, seized a pen, and assumed an absent look.

Sir John, in a clear, firm, determined tone, dictated in these words:—

“My dear Champion,

“I write in haste to contradict a report which has got abroad, that my wife had eloped with Lord Elfintower.

“I need not tell you that it is untrue; nevertheless, such a thing must not be allowed to go unnoticed.”

He paused, to see that Lord Ravensdale was duly writing down his words, and then went on thus:—

“I therefore authorise you to give it the fullest contradiction. The facts, I am ashamed to say, are as follows:—

“On the evening in question, a lady

(who must be nameless) came veiled to my house ——”

“Come, I say,” said Lord Ravensdale, involuntarily.

“On the evening in question,” repeated Sir John, “a lady (who must be nameless) came to my house. . . . Have you written it down?”

Lord Ravensdale wrote it down, and verified the same with what an American would call a “tall oath.”

“And by my previous orders,” continued Sir John, “was admitted privately into my private sitting-room. She remained there hardly two minutes, but my wife saw her, and suspected (not without reason) who she was.”

“If you drive things to this point, you may do your worst,” interrupted Lord Ravensdale, again manifesting a desire to “fight it out.”

“Do as you please,” answered Sir John; “but is it better to acknowledge *that*, or to

have the whole story — reversionary interest and all — proclaimed in spite of you?"

Another "tall oath" confirmed the wisdom of this view of the case.

Sir John remained silent till the disputed passage was written, and then he said,—

"Let's see — where did we leave off? . . . Ah! yes . . . (not without reason) who she was. Yes, that's it. . . . left the house within a quarter of an hour, and went to her father's place — supposing that her family had already gone there, as they had intended to do on that same day.

"Not knowing, at that time, where she had gone, and feeling much annoyed at the whole affair, I talked about it very incautiously, and so this report got about.

"I trust to your friendship to contradict it as widely and as minutely as possible.

"Believe me,

"My dear Campion,

"Yours very sincerely,

"RAVENSDALE."

Sir John rose from his chair, walked to the writing-table, and, taking up the letter, read it carefully through. He then turned to leave the room, but stopped half-way, and said, as he put the letter into his pocket, —

“I have done for you what you would never have done for yourself, if you had got up indignation-meetings till you were black in the face. I have made you seem to be an honest man. Some have honesty (as well as greatness) ‘thrust upon them.’ Now, suppose you try to hold what has been pitchforked on your shoulders. Good-bye.”

“You’ve got me into a cleft stick this time,” growled Lord Ravensdale, getting up to go out of the room by another door. “But look out how you come across me again, for I’m not going to forget this — that’s all.”

“Rest assured,” answered Sir John, “that I shall always do so, whenever I

catch you at blackguard tricks involving the reputation or happiness of those in whom I am interested."

Lord Ravensdale went out at one door, and Sir John at the other.

CHAPTER XIII.

(VALEDICTORY).

LORD RAVENSDALE speeded his parting guest with a "tall oath" from behind the farther door. Sir John speeded the contents of the letter which he himself had just dictated.

He speeded its contents, and he speeded his own commentaries, and he speeded other people's echoes of his commentaries. The contradiction to a report which had created a great sensation in the London world was rapid and final.

Culminating points of excitement are followed by a hush, a pause, a vacuum. This chapter is but a record of such a period; it tells of people floating on their backs down the stream of time.

Months of uneventful importance roll by. Edith returned to her husband's house

within a week of leaving it, and was on the same terms with him as before.

Constance's health has declined at a slow unvarying rate; she seems to watch the decay of her own vitality, as one who has no personal interest in life.

Rupert is abroad.

Caterina has accepted the annuity from Sir John Campion, and left England. But has she accepted the long and intricate lesson belonging to it? Charity inclines to the affirmative; but the action of moral antidotes is slow, and Caterina's disadvantages have been very great.

Sorry I am that I cannot have the pleasure of recording mortification to Lord Ravensdale as lasting and important as to her who, in spite of the heavy balance standing against her, deserved it so much less than he did. But the analogies of social life would by no means bear me out in such a statement: he continues to flourish according to his own understanding and desires.

Mrs. Grahame passes her leisure hours in repenting that she did not take the acute dowager's advice in spirit as well as letter.

Mr. Grahame laments the actual position of affairs domestic, so far as he understands them; but he still adheres to his belief that his wife knows what she's about — a compliment which the latter cannot reciprocate. It is supposed, by his most intimate friends, that the surviving impression in his mind will be the bluntness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins.

The slapping fine woman is getting up this social ladder slowly — perhaps surely; but the footing on that ladder is slippery for a certain distance.

The caterpillar has disappeared from the land of his birth, amid the lamentations of many tradesmen.

The hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper are about to start a company which will infallibly yield five hundred per

cent. to the shareholders. The liability is limited, but not the "calls."

Baron von Platchfusz is preparing an English translation, in forty-nine volumes, of his Commentary on Hävercamp's "*Sylloge Scriptorum qui de Linguae Græcæ Vera et Recta Pronuntiatione Commentarios reliquerunt.*"

Count Schönbeck still considers himself to have been aggrieved by Edith.

The Griffin has long since pushed away the affair from her mind: she looks upon it as Beau Brummel did upon his unsuccessful neckcloths.

Lord Sevenoaks and all his family are going on as usual, according to their respective idiosyncracies. Lady Julia is engaged to be married to a very shy man, who has a strong predilection for beer.

Miss Donaldson has made it up with Mrs. Grahame, because the alternative would have involved an undignified explanation to inquiring friends; but rankling

deep in her heart's core lies the imputation of having cost more than an extra pair of carriage horses and a man.

Spuckers continues to edify her mistress by many pungent sayings. She hits the right nail as full on the head as ever.

The acute dowager continues to frighten Mrs. Grahame out of her wits. It is not her fault, if the latter be ignorant of her own mistakes.

Sir John Campion went into the country a few days after his memorable interview with Lord Ravensdale. Before leaving town he wrote to Rupert the following letter:—

“I have got you out of the most complicated scrape that ever a sane man blundered into out of sulkiness and semi-sanctified Childe Haroldism.

“Had it not been for for your brother's sake, and the sake of those who would have been injured or compromised by your most unhandy work, you might have waited long

enough before you were helped by me — of this I very honestly assure you.

“Tell me where you are to be found. If you will not do so, you will only give me the trouble of ferreting you out; for find you I will—a promise to a dead man binds me to do it. Let me see you without delay; and if, when we meet, I see no more sense in you than you have shown for the last two years, I promise you that I will leave you in future to go to blazes in your own way.”

This letter he directed to Ernsford, and marked “To be forwarded;” but up to the period which the narrative has now reached, viz. the month of November, no answer had been received.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOWARDS the end of February Rupert arrived in London, where he remained from day to day — having business at Ernsford, yet hesitating to go there.

He wrote word of his arrival, and, in return, received a large packet of letters, which could not previously be forwarded, because he had omitted to give or send any address. Among them was one from Sir John Campion: it was the one mentioned at the end of the last chapter, and had therefore been written nearly seven months before.

Sir John was not then in town, but he received somewhere else a note which Rupert wrote immediately on receiving his.

Two or three days afterwards he returned to London, and they met by appointment at nine o'clock the next morning.

The morning was pinchingly cold: the atmosphere was the colour of Indian ink: the wind was strong, thin and cutting.

"Just the thing," thought Sir John, as he entered the house. "Just the thing—to a T. The hour and the temperature, and the general appearance of things—all do excellently. I like to get hold of a man before breakfast, on a raw morning—when I want to get the better of him. . . . Dead cold without, and emptiness, within are potent allies, when you want to make self-confidence shake in its shoes. . . . But, from the tenour of his note, I don't think there's much of it in him to shake just now. Perhaps there's too little—and that's just as troublesome, or in fact worse; for what are you to do with a man who can't believe in himself at all?"

Rupert looked much like one who had

arrived at that pitch of self-distrust: his countenance did not even express anxiety.

"How are you?" said Sir John. "You look ten years older. What's the last thing you have been doing?"

"Existing," answered Rupert. "I had done so much mischief before, that I determined, and still determine, that I will abstain from *doing*."

"Unless it be doing nothing," answered Sir John. "You will have to abstain from doing *that* before long, or repentance will come tumbling upon you with a force that will make you stare. Don't get on your hind legs."

Rupert. "I have no inclination to do so."

Sir John. "I—I know that: I see that: I"—(*aside*) "Confound him—He's going to say yes to everything, and collapse at every thrust—I know he is." (*aloud*) "Now, what do you think of yourself, as regards Miss Grahame?"

Rupert. "I think so ill of myself as

regards her, and I am so unable to think of anything else, if I think of anything, that I am reduced to the alternative of not thinking a tall, or thinking myself into a state past thinking—in other words, going almost mad at what I find in my thoughts.”

Sir John. “Never mind taking the shine out of the verb ‘to think,’ but look at the matter straight.”

Rupert. “So I do.”

Sir John. “No, you don’t.

Rupert. “I wish I had done so sooner.”

Sir John. “Therefore you go just as far on the *other* side of it. It is really amazing to see a man with large brains so helpless. You’re no more fit to take charge of yourself than a baby. A few months ago you would have flared up if I had asked you what you thought of yourself; and to-day, if I were to ask you whether you were not the greatest scoundrel in England, you would be ready to thank me for saying so.”

Rupert. “You would be nearer the

mark than people generally are when they apply such terms to their friends."

Sir John. "Why, what's come over you? You're as flat and stagnant as a duckpond."

Rupert. "I am so. I have suffered so much, that I have almost worn out the power of feeling."

Sir John. "Then you are happy in this sort of state?"

Rupert. "On the contrary. I am intensely miserable. I am a body living and moving without a soul."

A long silence ensued. Rupert seemed careless of explanations — desperately careless of everything. Any one might really have accused him of the most improbable crimes without eliciting from him a retort, or even a defensive reply. Sir John walked once or twice up and down the room, fairly bothered — there is no equivalent word.

"I knew it would be so," thought he. "The man collapses, like an India-rubber ball. If he would only stand on some

ground or other, one might have a chance of pulling him off it; but he floats on nothing, without any kind of attraction to steady him so that he may be got at. One might as well shove one's fist through the air as one's facts through his fallacies; the material is so thin that its momentary displacement is not even seen or felt."

He stopped, walked up and down the room again, and finally stopping opposite Rupert, said: "I have not yet given you the message that your brother delivered to me for you just before he died."

Rupert answered nothing; but he changed colour very evidently, and his attention became positive.

Sir John's countenance grew very grave, and lost its expression of sarcasm. He was silent for a few moments, and then continued as follows:

"When we met at Tedminster five years ago, I had not seen him for thirteen years — in fact, not since he was a small school-

boy; therefore, though I remembered him perfectly, and had always liked him, we were practically strangers. After that day I saw as much of him as I could, for his tone of mind and his way of thinking impressed me very much — far more, in fact, than I knew or supposed. I fell in with him in the winter of 18—, about four months after he left Carlsbad. I saw a great deal of him for some time, and afterwards also, as you more or less know. I never knew so humble-minded a man, or one so consistent. If I have thought more seriously, and done any good thing since then, I certainly owe it to the unpretentiously high tone of his mind, which insensibly entered into everything he said and did. He made one feel what was right, without telling one.”

“He did,” said Rupert, in a dull tone of affirmation.

“His life was a life of martyrdom,” continued Sir John. “No man ever felt more

intensely in every way. I never have seen a man manifest like him the qualities of a saint. Passion was stronger in him than any imaginable thing, except his control over it."

"It was not possible to resist such temptation, and live:" said Rupert, his voice and countenance beginning, for the first time, to change.

"Did anything particular occur a short time before he last left England?" asked Sir John.

"He never would say," answered Rupert. "He never would even listen to the subject; but I have the strongest reason to suppose that he — Don't ask me about it. It killed him. I am sure of that."

They remained silent for several minutes. At last Sir John said:

"Enough of this. You know the regard I have for his memory; you know the influence he had, and still has, upon me; you know that I would therefore take any trouble

for you—and have done so. Very well, then, you believe that I would? You trust me? Well, I see you do. All I have to say now is this: I was with him when he died. He made three requests of me; or rather, he begged me to help, at their need, three people—yourself, Miss Grahame, and Lady Ravensdale. That request is a law to me, and I have followed it to the best of my ability. As regards Lady Ravensdale I have been able to succeed: no one but you, Miss Grahame, and myself, will ever know the truth. As regards Miss Grahame and yourself——”

“Don’t couple our names,” said Rupert, in a tremulous voice.

“I *will* couple your names,” answered Sir John. “I promised your brother in his last moments, that ——”

“It was not irretrievable then,” said Rupert.

“Nor is it now,” answered Sir John.

"How did you happen to be at Naples *then?*" asked Rupert.

"Accidentally," answered Sir John. "I arrived the day you left, and chanced to meet his servant on the Chiaja. But let me return to the point, which is this—I promised him that I would always assist these three people at their need—and I further promised him that I would do my utmost to prevent you from making yourself miserable for the sake of an idea. Don't deceive yourself—I mean as regards either of you."

"I do not," said Rupert, sadly. "I am sure of us both; but, after what I did, it is impossible for me to approach her."

"That you *should* do so, was his last request," said Sir John. "They were almost his last words."

"What *were* his last?" said Rupert, growing deadly pale.

Sir John also became very pale, and his voice faltered as he replied: "His last words

were 'Tell Edith that, in my last moments, when life was ebbing, I ——' He never finished the sentence. Perhaps he was unable to speak, but my belief is that he broke off purposely — feeling death approach. He lived some minutes after that. I saw him in the attitude of prayer, and he died so — his countenance lighted up by an expression so saintlike that I never shall forget it or (please God!) ever be as I was before: it has influenced me in every important act since. You know, I suppose, that he died suddenly — I mean to say, in less than a quarter of an hour from the time when he was taken ill."

Many minutes elapsed before either of them spoke. At length Sir John said:

"Will you trust me? Then come."

CHAPTER XV.

BUT Sir John had not seen Constance since Christmas — or he would not have been so sanguine. Had he seen her when he saw Rupert he would have felt that the struggle had lasted just too long; and appearances would have gone far to justify him in thinking so. She showed no symptoms of positive illness, but vitality seemed to be slowly ebbing away.

The Dowager Lady Ravensdale was at Moorfield; Edith had just arrived; Miss Donaldson had just gone away.

The morning was as cold and dark there as in London — the wind as thin and cutting: the distant hills looked, as it were, swept clean of definite colour by the howling blast. The sheep herded together, and

sought shelter behind hedgerows. The cutting wind, in its strong, steady course across the park, rippled and whitened the surface of the taller grass-blades: it roared deep and monotonous in the chimney: it moaned along the angles of the wall, it sighed among the leafless branches; it wailed in the window sill. All nature appealed to the memories of the Past; and the Past seemed to have no communication with the Present or the Future.

Edith rose from her bed more tired and depressed than when she had entered it. She looked slowly round the room, and tears welled up into her eyes — trickling heavily down the lines that sorrow and remorse had stamped on her beautiful cheek.

It was her old room, where Constance had come to see her on the morning after the Tedminster Ball, and after their drive to Ernsford, and again many times — times mentioned and unnoticed in this book —

times most pregnant — times that memory clung to, shuddering:

The door was opened slowly and with difficulty — not as by one who hesitates, but as by one whose vigour is waning. Constance entered, and walked very feebly across the room. She sat down in an arm-chair without speaking, and threw herself back in it, quite exhausted by the fatigue of coming from her own room, though it was close by. At length she raised her head, and said:

“Edith! I am very glad you have come in time.”

“Oh, what do you mean? what in the name of horror do you mean?” screamed Edith, in such a tone of anguish as, when once heard, leaves its sound intermittently echoing in the memory.

“I mean,” said Constance, “that my days are numbered. I don’t think it is immediate: I have gone on in this way, more or less, for the last three months. But—for

every reason I am glad you came when you did. I have not seen you since . . . July; and writing is insufficient. Tell me more. Tell me all . . . in a few words, for I am very weak this morning."

Edith was so stunned that she had no power to hesitate. She answered at once:

"It was never himself that I . . . Constance, *do* believe me . . ."

"I will. I do," replied Constance, feebly.

"Nor did *he*," said Edith. "He followed me during those six weeks . . . in hatred, not in ——"

She paused in doubt and terror: Constance seemed to take so little notice of her words.

"I tell you the truth," she said, at length. "It was in hatred—yet not conscious hatred. He hated me without acknowledging to himself that he did so. We were both almost mad. He acknowledged all this to me on that dreadful even-

ing. I asked him to forgive me for having been the death of Edgar; and he *did* forgive me. You know the rest, of all that happened. . . . But you do *not* know what drove me from my husband's house. It was this: A woman closely veiled came to him under an assumed name, on that very evening. She was taken into his private sitting-room. That woman was Caterina Guarini—I knew her—Guarini—I knew her—she whom you spoke of here in this room, five years ago, before you were old enough to know what it meant—she who was the model for Francesca da Rimini—she whose child you saved from drowning—she who so wickedly deceived Rupert (you don't know how artfully) and forwarded the notes . . . I did not mean to have gone; but seeing her . . . It drove me mad: it was an insult to Edgar's memory. I rushed out of the house."

"Poor creature! Poor Caterina!" said Constance, in a voice of much emotion.

"The deterioration of that woman is one of the saddest realities that came before me. If I could only ——"

She shuddered and burst into tears.

"If I had always taken your advice," said Edith, after some minutes had passed, "I should be happy now, and he would be alive, and you and ——"

"The future is yours," said Constance ; a hard one it is ; but ——"

"I deserve it," interrupted Edith. "It was not my mother's fault ; it was mine. I have no one but myself to blame. I have been doing my best to atone for it by accepting my lot without complaining of it to myself or to any one. I have been trying to do my duty to my husband—trying to feel as a wife to him — trying to ——"

She shuddered uncontrollably, a burning hot blush reddened her cheek. Constance raised herself in her chair, clasped her in her arms, and said :

"Thank God! you are worthy of Edgar now."

* * * * *

There was a chill in the house, though red-burning coals and blazing oak-tops were piled up high in every grate; it was something besides the chill of the cutting wind; it was a chill at the heart—a cold apprehensiveness, that made mind, and body seem one, in respect of that chill sensation. Constance moved feebly, and rested much—even more than the previous day; therefore there was a chill in the house.

Mr. Grahame had totally neglected his hunting, and forgotten the bluffness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, in the reality of his sorrow.

Mrs. Grahame had grown pale and lost much of the solid weight that once filled out many yards of rustling silk. She possessed deeper feelings than she herself had understood; and this had awakened them. Her position was very pitiable.

Spuckers had grown gloomy; her pungent sayings were no longer heard: she scarcely spoke at all, except to the old housekeeper at Ernsford.

But no one mourned more consistently than the Dowager Lady Ravensdale. She only spoke once on the subject, and then only because much pressed by a neighbour to do so. She said:

“For the last four years I have loved her as if she had been my own child. I have been as much interested in her, and as proud of her, as if she had been my own child. I have known no girl like her, nor shall I ever again. Every interest in life has turned out a disheartening failure, except this . . . and this . . . ”

She turned away and left the room without saying another word of any kind. She had underrated the extent of her own grief.

The cutting wind hissed more cuttingly in the angles of the portico, as the sun went

down in black darkness behind the hills that stretched westward on the other side of Ernsford Court. Black darkness rolled quickly over the land : black darkness and the howling blast reigned in dual supremacy.

Constance lay on a sofa in a sitting-room upstairs, weaker than she had ever been : the excitement of her early interview with Edith, and the fatigue of much subsequent conversation, had exhausted her so much as to cause something worse than anxiety. She lay motionless, and seemed to take no notice at all : she seemed to doze with her eyes open : she did this during two or three consecutive hours. They watched her—and that something more than anxiety grew into alarm, and alarm into misgiving. Why did she doze so very long ?

But she was not exactly dozing — for her mind held its images separately ; neither was she thinking — for the images were not consecutive. Her mind did not range, but floated, over the space of her own life :

it floated over the whole space, and absorbed within itself all remembered things which that space contained.

Separate, yet simultaneously present, were such images as these: Scenes of childhood — its unexpectant cravings and its checked expansions: scenes of girlhood — its struggles, its sufferings, its wishes, its beliefs, its hours of sudden comprehension or mental growth, its hours of action and reaction: scenes of dawning womanhood — its lovingness, its hushed aspirations, its definite object, its hopes — raised, deferred and scattered — its long hours of silent sufferance.

And in these scenes there rose up distinct images of forms and faces belonging to them. Edith was there — as when she roamed in the woods at Ernsford, a golden-haired child — as when she rose from her bed after the Tedminster ball — as when she sketched the gatehouse at Ernsford — as when she returned from the riding-party at Carls-

bad—as when she stood trembling in irresolute unwillingness, half an hour before her wedding—as when she clutched, in a paroxysm of despair, the note, whose written characters recalled the past, with such a force of passion that her brain grew giddy—as when she last rose from her bed in her old room there at Moorfield, while the cutting wind howled over the park, and cleared up the horrible mystery that neither of them could put into words, by reason of the shuddering horror attached to it.

Edgar was there—as when he garlanded Edith's golden hair—as when he did battle with his own heart on the terrace at Ernsford—as when, on the following morning, he stood under the east window of the old gallery, saying things that turned the current of her own life and set in motion her dormant self—as when, four months later, stood on the same spot beside Edith, betrothed and happy—as when, three years having passed, he stood there again, and

said things that shaped the course of her own life's object—as when, a few weeks afterwards, he left Ernsford for the last time, passing by the copse where Edith lay crouched up in dumb, expressionless misery.

Rupert was there, under all aspects and appearances that had fascinated and grieved her during the last three years. He was there as answering to her ideal, as keeping her in a martyrdom of suspense—as seen with Caterina in Kensington Gardens, self-aborrent and excited—as seen at the corner of Dover Street, typifying despair.

But gradually, by reason of her fixed attention and reduced strength, these pictures grew dim and inter-confused; so that, when the sun went down over the hills beyond Ernsford, an impression of abstract sorrow was all that remained, to show her that she was living and awake.

The sun went down, and a dark twilight spread over the land: Constance had not spoken or moved for two hours past. Twi-

light deepened into pitch darkness, and candles were lighted: she took no notice whatever. Alarm grew more distinct in the minds of those around her: misgiving formed itself into words ready for utterance: they stood afraid to speak.

In such suspense as this, minutes grew long, and silence became more intolerable than the acknowledgment of a definite fear. Edith drew back, and, turning towards the Dowager Lady Ravensdale, said, or rather stammered:

"What . . . what is it? *Do* say . . . Tell me! I—don't like it; it frightens me . . . it frightens me dreadfully."

"I *can't* tell you, poor child," answered the Dowager, sadly. "I will not say that I am actually frightened, but I don't like it at all. Let her rest a little longer—it may be good for her. If she remains so . . . then I shall be frightened—no, I hope not frightened, but *very* anxious."

They were still watching beside her—

still hesitating to speak, for her eyes had closed: she seemed to have fallen asleep. The wind had risen to a gale since sunset, and blew so heavily against that side of the house as to drown the noise of carriage wheels which otherwise might have been heard approaching.

Soon afterwards a servant came in, and told the Dowager Lady Ravensdale that Sir John Campion had arrived, and wished to see her privately in the library.

She left the room at once, and, hurrying downstairs, found him and also Rupert.

She looked at Rupert keenly, sternly, sadly, affectionately. He did not shrink from her gaze, but the expression of his own countenance grew more sad as he watched hers.

"Lord Elfintower," she said very solemnly, "I believe you have not set foot in this house since your brother's death till now?"

"I have not:" he answered, coming forward to where she stood.

The light of the candles fell full upon him, showing a face quite void of colour and features grown rigid by long continuance of suffering.

"I have not," he repeated, after a moment's pause. "I have not been here for more than two years. I should not have come now, but for the assurance that I have a value and importance most widely distinct from my own contemptible worthlessness."

"I think I understand you," answered the Dowager. "I think you are what I first took you to be, and what I long supposed you to be. You have not come here in this sudden manner without a purpose. Tell me, as a man of honour, what do you come for?"

"I come to see Miss Grahame, if she will see me," answered Rupert.

The Dowager scrutinised his countenance more keenly than before, and said:

"Do you come upon the spur of a sudden impulse—a qualm of conscience—an in-

stinct of pity and shame—a feeling of chivalry—a sense of right? Or is your own inclination sufficient to bring you—apart from all these promptings?”

“It is sufficient,” answered Rupert; “more than sufficient. Nothing but an overwhelming sense of self-contempt could have resisted it so long.”

The Dowager looked very much relieved, yet puzzled, as if doubting what course to pursue.

“Miss Grahame is ill,” she said; “very ill, I am afraid. Why did you not come before?”

Rupert said nothing; but he quivered from head to foot, and his brow contracted into deeper lines of deeper suffering.

“Her strength is gone,” said the Dowager. “She can hardly walk from one room upstairs to another, or even sit up for long together. And to-day she is even worse than she has been at all; she has taken no notice of any one since three

o'clock. . . . The doctor says he can do nothing; therefore perhaps ——”

She turned away, and left the room, motioning him to follow. They went upstairs, and, at the end of a long passage, reached the door of the sitting-room; it was the old schoolroom. She went in, leaving him in the passage; and, returning very soon, made him a sign to enter. He did so, and was alone with Constance.

A lamp was on a table near the sofa; a large paper shade was on the lamp, throwing a subdued but strong light on the sofa. Constance seemed to be asleep—at least her eyes were closed, and a very slight breathing was perceptible. Had it not been for this last evidence, she would scarcely have been supposed alive,—so clearly did the white lamp-light make paleness more pale; yet on her countenance the impress of youth was more distinctly traceable than ever it had been before. As Rupert stood beside her, or rather, at a

little distance off, the difference between their ages seemed not three — but at least ten years.

Fearing either to speak or be silent, he stood there quite motionless — but not long. Constance slowly opened her eyes, and turned them upon him.

She showed no sign of surprise, and, but for the smile that played round her lips, might have been supposed to look without seeing — so calmly her eyes rested upon his features. Her eyes and her heart acknowledged him; her mind as yet took no note of his presence.

Rupert felt, rather than saw, the calm transpectant look and the ineffable smile — a rapid movement, that was alike involuntary and irresistible brought him almost to her side.

The expression of her countenance began to change, as her eyes began to see something besides what they had seen before, and her mind to distinguish what her heart had felt before. A blush of faintest hue

stole over her cheek for a moment, and mantled up quickly into rosy pink. She made an effort to rise; and failing, raised her hands instinctively to conceal that tell-tale colour. Rupert stood for a moment irresolute — then, as by fresh force of impulse, bounded forward and knelt beside her.

The mantling blush on Constance's cheek softened into a paly pink that fluttered and then grew steady: it was not quite the hue of sentient life, but it seemed to hold out hopes of becoming so.

He hesitated no more, but gently placing his right hand under her head raised her nearly upright on the sofa.

"Constance," he said, in a voice over which he had nearly lost all control, "I am miserably unworthy of you — utterly unfit to approach you . . . in any way whatever, and least of all as I now come. Can you listen to me as you once might have listened?"

Constance raised her eyes to his simply,

and without any accompanying gesture or accompanying words. There was little expression in those eyes beyond what he had seen when she first opened them; but they told him he might say on.

Still supporting her with one hand, he clasped her pale fingers with the other, and said :

“ You can listen to me as you once might have listened — as you once would have listened, if *I* had listened to my own heart and been true to myself ? ”

The paly pink again fluttered on her cheek and again grew steady — but more life-like. She sighed very slightly, as one who is awaking from a weary sleep. Rupert waited, in silence and fearful anxiety, for some verbal sign of recognition. At length he said :

“ Would you have listened, then ? Would you — now ? ”

Constance fixed her eyes full upon him, and answered in a faint but clear voice :

"Yes: then and now."

"I was untrue to myself," said Rupert: "untrue to my holiest instincts—untrue to all that my heart had recorded of . . . us both."

"The temptation to turn away was terrible:" she replied. "Instincts most noble and unselfish attracted you from . . . where your first impulse had taken you."

"My first impulse led me to you:" said Rupert. "My last impulse does the same, but even more powerfully. I have been influenced by you ever since—even when, in morbid bitterness of spirit, I avoided you. That influence can never diminish, nor can it ever grow greater—being already complete. But, after what I did in . . . a state of mind equivalent to madness, can you feel as you would have felt otherwise? It cannot be: I have no right to expect it or hope for it."

Constance did not answer. The rose tint of sentient life was beginning to fade

from her cheek: the action of joy upon her physical system had been greater than it could bear: reaction was doing its heart-sickening work.

He watched her a few moments in silence and the unutterable suspense of hope. She leant heavily against his arm, and her eyelids drooped over her eyes, from which tears began to trickle slowly. He bent down, and, twining his arm more nervously round her graceful form, gently raised her upright, as if he desperately hoped that a distinctive attitude of waking life could enforce the reality.

Her eyelids still drooped, and her beautiful form still leant against his arm in sentient helplessness. She had not fainted — she breathed as evenly as an infant; she was physically prostrated for the time being, and nothing more. Mental depression had brought the body to a state of extreme weakness, so that it now staggered under its load of joy.

He clasped her yet more nervously in his arms; and anxiety grew intolerable. He heard not the even, infantlike sound of her breath, though it fanned his cheek as he bent over her; it was drowned in the loud beating of his own heart.

"Constance," he said at last, in a voice of such agony as only sound can express, "oh! speak to me! say anything — if only one word . . . Constance!"

She said nothing, but she opened her eyes for an instant—and they spoke of love ineffable. Her head drooped upon his shoulder, and lay pillowed there.

* * * * *

CHAPTER XVI.

MIND undid what mind had done. The paly pink hue again fluttered and grew steady on Constance's cheek, and soon again it deepened into the warm tint of sentient life—but not yet: the work of time can only be undone in time.

A few hours proved that alarm was groundless; but days had multiplied into weeks before she could fairly be said to have recovered. Rupert grew more like his brother—more really like him than before; and the difference was, that now the resemblance could be made more apparent by scrutiny.

Sir John Campion remained only two days at Moorfield: he had an engagement elsewhere, and no cause to remain. He

had fulfilled the triple promise made two years before in the chamber of death: he had assisted Edith, Rupert, and Constance at their utmost need. He went away late in the afternoon of the third day — most honestly rejoicing, yet low in animal spirits.

The Dowager Lady Ravensdale remained but a few days longer.

Mr. Grahame went into Leicestershire, in quest of hunting non-provincial. Mrs. Grahame went to London in quest of bargains.

The next month was one of pre-nuptial honeymoon uninterrupted.

The month after was one of pre-nuptial details.

“Non ragioniam di lor; ma guarda e passa.”‡

April comes round again in the ever-moving circle of years. Again there are bridal preparations in Grosvenor Square.

And like an April day is the present scene. Joy sparkles and glistens in the tears of the Past; but there are spots on

which it does not yet shine. Constance is happy as regards her dual self—happy without diminution or reserve; yet the picture she sees has a cold background, where stand Edith and Edgar, and where, as belonging, yet apart, stands Caterina. Turn we from this last image—the most painful of the three. Turn we from all sad images—they accord not with a bridal on which one of spring-time's fairest days is smiling.

The sun shines steadily in a cloudless sky: the air is warm and freshly fragrant; flowers, many and beautiful, perfume the staircase. There is a sound of voices, and then a hush. Constance, veiled in white, descends the staircase. Spuckers peeps over the banisters, and makes eulogistic remarks.

An hour passes. She has been to the altar and returned to the house. Many carriages are driving up to the door; many guests are assembled and assembling in the

drawing-room ; festal preparations are being made in the dining-room.

Mr. Grahame has forgotten Rupert's former surliness ; satisfaction beams in his countenance, as he surveys the scene and vigorously pushes away from his mind the recollection of the last wedding-breakfast that took place in that house—five years ago. He sees Edith—and, finding that her beauty is very evident both to himself and to others, he infers that all is well with her. He sees Constance — and an expression of half-incredulous admiration steals over his face, corrugating his brow lengthways, and raising the corners of his mouth. He sees his own wife, and is thoroughly convinced that she is a monstrous clever woman, and has done everything for the best. He sees a little farther—he had better not have seen so far, in respect of his own comfort—for there, at the bottom of the room, near the door, stands that bluffest of ladies, Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins. He slinks away, and

scratches his right whisker as of yore. Five years and a half have not sufficed to dim his recollection of her bluntness.

Mrs. Grahame looks humbled, and proportionably happier.

Lord Ravensdale looks aware of his own deserts—to be kicked.

Sir John Campion is thoughtful and subdued ; but his countenance is more pleasant to look upon than erst it was ; and he is quite as amusing as ever.

The Dowager looks graceful and stately as she is wont to do. Her countenance shows joy, visibly tempered by sorrow. How can it be otherwise, when her most contemptible only son is standing distantly behind Constance—a vanishing point to that picture ?

Lady Rosssden looks as charming as ever, and her unmarried daughter as commonplace as ever. Lord Rosssden is on a committee.

Lady Julia is as ungraceful as ever. The

shy husband, whom she married a few months ago, is somewhere—not there.

Lord Sevenoaks is congratulating Constance with the same mild persistency that he formerly displayed in furtherance of his own hopes matrimonial.

Edith has become more beautiful since she accepted the past and present. Touchingly beautiful she is. It is difficult to look upon her husband in a spirit of forbearance.

Another hour passes. The breakfast is over, and the guests, diminished to half their original number, are again standing in groups about the drawing-room.

Again there is a sound of voices upstairs—again a hush. Constance, dressed for the journey, descends the staircase that will never be trodden so gracefully until she shall tread it again.

* * * * *

It is a gala day at Ernsford. And, towards the evening of that day, the old

housekeeper listens anxiously for the expected sound of carriage wheels rolling through the gatehouse.

Six years have passed since Edgar drove Sir John Campion home from the Tedminster ball. That ball has been repeated annually—the last was but a few days ago; and some of the same people have appeared at each successive one—the course of their lives, then and intermediately, being smooth and invariable as the ball room floor on which they ungracefully laboured and jerked.

And some have never appeared there since; and some will never appear there again; and some have appeared there, having intermediately reached some turning point in their lives.

Enough of this! The retrospect is cold, and we cannot alter it; and a bridal carriage is passing.

We draw near to the end of the story, yet, as regards some of those who have

played very important parts in it, we leave much uncertainty. It must be so. Why should we essay to do in a book more than can be done in that human life which it represents? *There* future events lie in dim shadow: why then should they be made manifest in narration?

And here, as there, we find things which, in respect of justice, human intellect cannot explain — for they lie beyond the range of its comprehension. We “see through a glass darkly,” and cannot possibly discern why many things have happened. But here, as there, they do happen, and we shall do well to submit without murmur or question.

The bridal carriage passes on through the street of Tedminster; it passes by the hotel where the reader first saw Edgar and Sir John Campion; it passes out into the country by the same road that Edgar took six years ago; it passes on rapidly towards Ernsford Court, and, a little before sunset,

enters the archway of the gate-house, bearing Rupert and his bride to the home of their childhood—the home of their married life.

* * * * *

They are standing together in the old gallery. He folds her passionately in his arms; and as they stand—looking out from one of the south windows over the terraces and distant woods, he says—or rather thinks aloud, these words:

“Guardian angel and wife.”

THE END.

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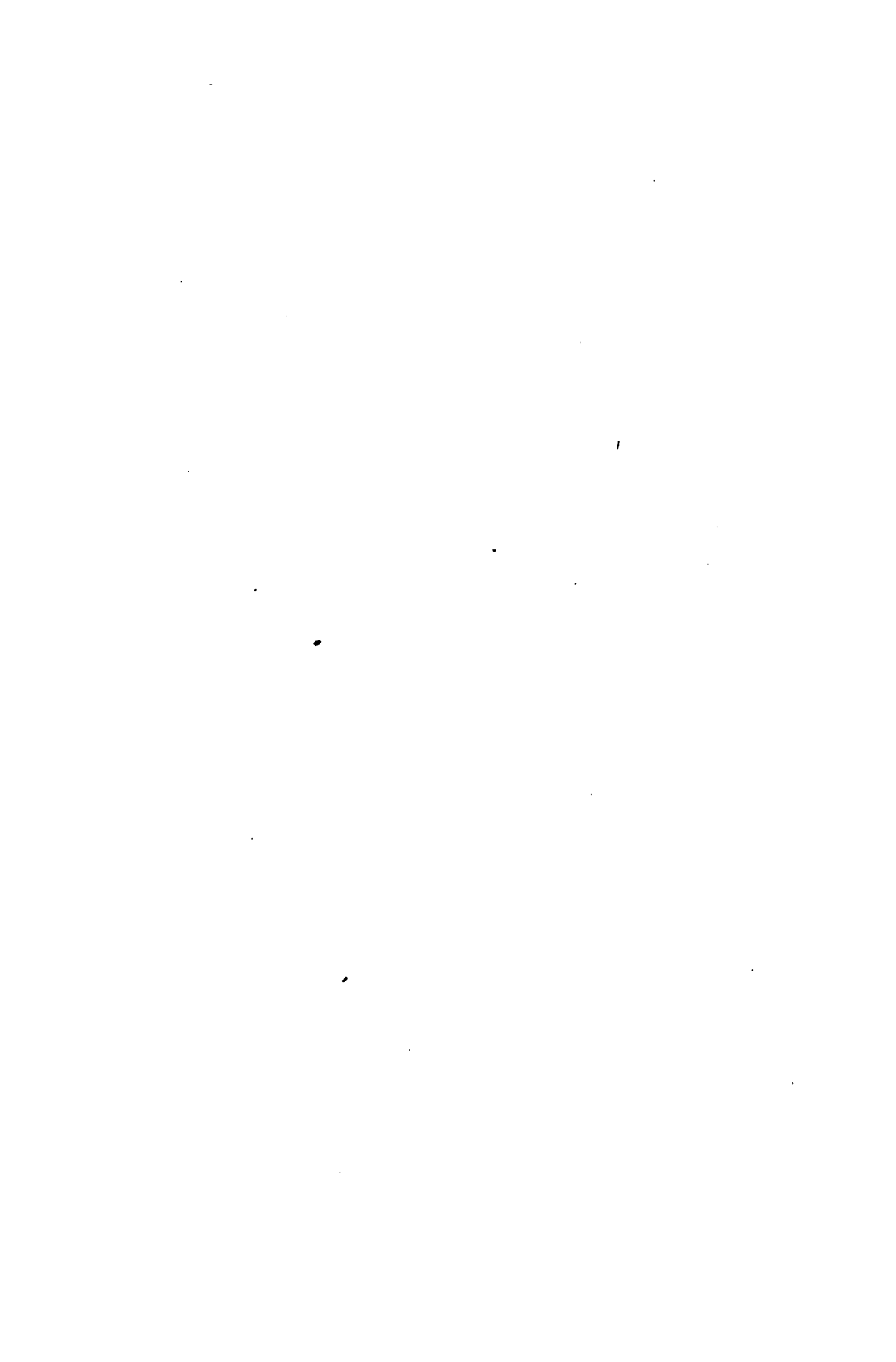
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